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So you think you are a good school! An evaluation of one school's strategies for raising the achievement of those pupils identified as underachieving: Is target setting the answer or should we also be listening to and responding to the views of the pupils'?

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So you think you are a good school!

An evaluation
of one school's strategies for raising the
achievement of those pupils identified
as underachieving:

Is target setting the answer or
should we also be listening to and
responding to the views
of the pupils'?

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION (EdD)

15th September 2004

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Dedicated to the memory of my eldest son

James

**Who had every faith
in me and had nicknamed me Doc Dig.**

Taken so tragically

14 October 1982 – 24 November 2000

‘...gone, but always here...’



Faculty of Education and Language Studies

Doctorate in Education

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To all my friends, for their support and encouragement.

ABSTRACT

With the introduction of 'school league tables', added pressure is placed upon schools to improve pupil examination performance. One of the main areas of interest therefore, is for schools to identify pupils who are on the grade D/C borderline and those pupils with the potential to achieve five or more GCSEs at grade C or above and then target them in some way to help them realise their potential. This study takes place in an 11-16 Voluntary Aided Roman Catholic school. The senior management team has identified a group of pupils who they feel are underachieving basing their conclusions on pupil performance data. The group of pupils targeted are all in Year 11 and all are felt to be capable of achieving five or more grade "C" GCSEs but are on the D/C border line in a number of subjects. A strategy has been put in place to target these pupils with senior staff as mentors. The study looks to see if this is the most appropriate way to identify and raise underachievement and if this is the most effective time in their academic career to target the pupils. Using a questionnaire, a survey was completed focusing on pupil motivation to try and find out exactly if and when demotivation and underachievement occurs at this school. The indications suggest that the senior management strategy is probably occurring too late and motivation needs addressing earlier down the school, possibly as early as Year 7. It also appeared that there was very little evaluation of the strategy by management and as a result it was not developing further. Very little work appears to have been done on pupils' perspectives of their schooling and what contribution they can make to school improvement. The questionnaire identified what was happening with respect to motivation in the school but being a quantitative collection method did not explain why. The obvious source of information to investigate this problem was the pupils themselves. A series of qualitative techniques were used to canvas pupils' perceptions of the school's strategies to see if any recommendations could be generated to further increase pupil examination achievement. It was found that pupils' perceptions should seriously be considered in policy formulation and that the initiative could be further improved through regular evaluation.

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Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the chapter

This dissertation is a report of an evaluation into a management strategy for identifying and targeting underachieving pupils. The strategy had been running for four years with no apparent evaluation and no empirical data collected to inform management of the apparent success or otherwise of the outcomes of the strategy. The study was divided into two main parts; firstly collecting and analysing the views of the pupils involved, and secondly evaluating the methods used by the management team in the identification and setting of individual targets and monitoring pupil progress. The first chapter of the dissertation presents the background of the study, specifies the questions being asked, describes its significance and presents an overview of the methodology used. The chapter concludes by noting the limitations of the study and defining some of the special terms used.

Background of the study

The issue of identifying and then attempting to deal with underachievement has always caused problems for teachers, parents and managers. In recent years it seems to have become a national phenomena with underachievement, especially in boys almost becoming a fact of life (TES, Nov 2002). When I started teaching in the early eighties, it was the girls who were seen as underachievers, especially in my subject of science. They did less well than boys in their GCE exams and fewer were likely to go on to university. However, a social and economic transformation was starting with parents, schools and girls becoming more aware of what they could do and achieve. Schools made a conscious effort to redress the imbalance and reduce the achievement gap with in service training for teachers looking at how girls learn best, worked best, widening the curriculum to remove the 'girl subject' / 'boy subject' distinction and offering

more comprehensive career advice. As educationalists we appear to have been very successful in turning around this achievement gap, so successful that girls now out perform boys. The TES Nov 2002, provides an interesting breakdown of national statistics for 2001 which, are summarised as follows:

- 55.4% of girls achieved 5 or more A*-C grades against 44.5% of boys.
- The average point score for girls was 42.5, and for boys was 36.6.
- Post-16, 76% of girls stayed on in full-time education against 67% of boys.
- 50% of the girls did A-levels compared to 43% of the boys.
- Of the pupils passing 3 or more A-levels 55% were girls.
- 55% of university graduates were women.

These statistics pose an interesting question, are girls out performing boys because they are more able than boys or is it because boys are underachieving?

With the introduction of 'school league tables' where the results of schools are published, added pressure is placed upon teachers and pupils to gain the best results possible from the pupils. The important defining grades that enable schools to be compared at present are the number of pupils gaining 5 or more C grades and above. This makes the identification of pupils on the D/C borderline important to schools, especially those pupils who are identified as underachieving, as once identified they can then be targeted with the possibility of moving them up to a grade C or higher. It was with this process as a management strategy that the research was concerned.

The school where the research took place, known as St. James' for the purpose of this research to conceal its identity, is an 11-16 Voluntary Aided Catholic school, and has a five-form entry of around 156 pupils per year group drawing on an extensive catchment area. St James' is the only Catholic Secondary School in the North of the county and currently caters for pupils of all abilities, both boys and girls between the ages of 11-16. According to the OFSTED team (OFSTED November 2000) St James' is a very good school where standards

are above average and pupils make considerably better progress than would be expected given their prior achievement. A more comprehensive description of the context of the school appears in the chapter on methodology.

The problem statement

The school has been identified by OFSTED as a very good school, the leadership and management very good and strong. Can the school improve still further? It was hoped that by evaluating a strategy put in place by senior management to improve pupil performance, recommendations could be made for the strategy's improvement and also for whole school improvement. Following the implementation of the strategy and my involvement at various stages in the process, it appeared that the senior management team were relying on statistical data and some teacher perceptions in the identification of underachieving pupils. Nowhere in the identification phase of the strategy were pupil perceptions solicited. There also appeared to be very little if any evaluation of the strategy in terms of what was being done, how it could be improved and what benefits it could bring to whole school improvement. The main evaluation of the strategy appeared to be a statistical analysis of the final results of the whole cohort with little reference to the targeted pupils' perceptions of their own needs or to any of the previous year's cohorts results.

My Research Questions

The main aim of the research was to evaluate current practice in raising pupil examination achievement at the school. This was done by, investigating current practice and evaluating the practice of senior management. Pupils' perceptions were elicited in order to formulate recommendations for further raising of pupil examination achievement.

This was achieved by asking the following questions:

1. Had the initiative achieved what it set out to achieve, the identification of underachieving pupils their targeting and improvement of their examination performance? This was a concern to me as it was my year group involved at the time of the study and as their Head of Year I wanted the best for them.

2. What evaluation of the initiative was taking place by senior management and how were the results of the evaluation being used to inform improvements? From my previous involvement evaluation did not appear to be occurring in the management cycle of this initiative. If this was found to be the case then how might evaluation be incorporated into the cycle economically and feasibly?

3. Had the identification of underachievers been left too late in the pupils' academic career and if so is it possible to identify underachievement earlier and act upon it effectively? From personal observation and closely working with my Year Group it appeared to me that an intervention strategy that occurred earlier than Year 11 for tackling underachievement may prove to be more effective in raising pupils' grades.

4. Could the perceptions of the pupils about the initiative be used to inform the effectiveness of the school and its further improvement? As this initiative was happening to the pupils their views on it could provide a different perspective, one that could be considered in any future evaluation that took place. This was where my main interest lay as little research had been done in the area of pupils' perceptions at the time of this study. From dealings with my pupils I had found them to be highly perceptive with a lot of relevant things to say about their experience of education and how to improve their learning. Did pupils therefore, have sufficient insight into their education to provide data that could be used to improve an initiative that was aimed at improving their teaching and learning?

As these issues were researched other issues emerged from the data concerning how the strategy was evaluated, in particular communication between the mentors as the initiative progressed. This then allowed an opportunity to reflect on the management style, communication and structure of the senior management team, which then lead to a discussion of the school's effectiveness and improvement. An ethical issue also concerned me. As educationalists we are concerned with the education of all pupils in our care. To positively discriminate in favour of a certain group of pupils due to the external pressure placed upon the school is understandable but does not sit well on the conscience.

The professional significance of the study

The study examines in a real life setting the implementation and evolution of a strategy that appeared to have no formal evaluation as part of the management cycle. It did not appear therefore to be moving forward, lacking coordination and direction, with little being learnt from the process that could be used to inform whole school improvement.

Also, with the importance now placed by the school in identifying and monitoring these pupils it appeared that the process was taking place far too late in the academic career of the pupils. Waiting for the mock examination results before identification seemed to be leaving too little time for targeting and working with the pupils to improve their grades. The information gathered from the questionnaire on school life sought to discover whether such pupils who underachieve could be identified earlier than Year 11.

With respect to the the issues identified earlier, that of finding ways to address underachievement and the gender gap there appeared to be a very useful initiative at St. James' to deal with these problems. With the lack of evaluation taking place the opportunity that senior management had to make an effective impact on underachievement was going to pass by. An evaluation of the initiative would also provide points that could be raised to further improve the strategy, for example trying to identify if underachievement is identifiable earlier in the academic careers of pupils and if so strategies for improvement instigated. Once identified these new strategies could then be introduced and implemented further down the school.

If this then leads to management strategies being identified that improve the performance of underachieving pupils these strategies can then be used for the benefit of all the pupils, and perhaps shared with other schools. If underachieving pupils can be identified as early as possible in their academic careers more time would then become available for intervention strategies to be put in place for the pupils. This may then encourage management to evaluate their approach to the initiative in particular the communication between actors involved with the strategy, perhaps having implications for management structure and ethos.

In summary, the results from the study may then help to improve the initiative and suggest ways forward, not just for this particular initiative but also may help the senior managers reflect on the effectiveness of management processes at the school.

Overview of methodology

The issue of methodology appears in a later chapter but there follows a brief general statement of the methods used.

The data collected for the evaluation was as follows:

- Questionnaire on school life.
- Structured interviews on pupils for pre initiative perceptions.
- Questionnaire on pupils for post initiative perceptions.
- Lesson observation of disruptive underachieving male pupil.
- Unstructured interview of disruptive underachieving male pupil.
- Comparison of the predictive analytical tools used by the senior management team.

This study is therefore an evaluation of the school's initiative on tackling underachievement especially in boys.

To judge how successful the initiative had been two methodological approaches were employed. A scientific approach with the use of statistical analysis of data and comparison of exam results and predictive tools and a more interpretive and subjective approach to enable people to explain their different perspectives through their different experiences, a position not covered by the positivist paradigm. Due to these observations and what the study was trying to achieve a mixed method approach was undertaken.

As well as looking at the methods used to identify underachievers I felt that the opinions, observations and suggestions of the pupils involved were worth pursuing considering the lack of research into this area at the time the project was first started. This would offer a different perspective, one not normally considered in policy formulation by senior management in schools.

Because I wanted to assess the impact of the strategy on the people it was happening to I wanted to get their personal opinions which I felt were best solicited through interviews. The last thing I wanted to do was to lose the interest of the identified underachieving pupils by giving them a lengthy questionnaire to complete. This qualitative approach allowed me the opportunity to build relationships with these pupils, letting them realise that this research was aimed at finding out why they were underachieving but, and more

importantly, giving them a voice, a voice that could be used to influence what was happening to all underachieving pupils. This would happen by taking into account and acting on their opinions in the formulation of school policy in addressing underachievement.

Limitations of the study

This study focused mainly on small groups, the findings therefore may not be generalisable outside this school setting. However, this may not be the case of some of the general findings. For example underachievement may well manifest itself at a far earlier age than first thought. Strategies may be better informed if the perceptions of pupils are considered seriously in policy formulation. The importance of evaluating an initiative should be seen as an integral part of the management cycle providing information that can be acted on for the initiatives improvement. Evaluation of initiatives is required for the initiative to become more effective.

The issue of underachievement was dealt with by one particular strategy at the school. This strategy may not work at a different school perhaps for a number of reasons. Timetable constraints may not allow for a mentoring system of underachieving pupils with senior staff. Underachievement may not be seen as an important issue when compared to other pressing issues like achieving Specialist School Status. The predictive tool YELLIS has to be bought into. This is something that other schools may not wish to consider with it being externally set and marked giving the school less control and perhaps not accounting for particular circumstances within the school. There is also the issue of time spent on the initiative compared with its outcomes, is it worth the time and effort?

The collection of data was done in a particular way, which may not suit the settings of other organisations. Issues of insider research may reduce the validity and reliability of data collected through clouded judgements on my part

and also the issue of respondent self-protection on the part of the pupils being questioned, leading them into giving 'safer' less rich data. However, being a part of the organisation may give a better understanding of the setting where the initiative takes place and what outcomes are wanted from the initiative in that setting.

Definition of key terms

A list of all the key terms used in this dissertation together with their definitions can be found in appendix 1

Chapter 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In light of these Research Questions a variety of studies and writings have been reviewed and informed the study. In this review the following were interrogated: literature on accountability, school improvement and school effectiveness, value-added measures and pupils' perception studies, the influence of gender, varying achievement and test data. There then follows readings related to pupil motivation and self esteem. Finally, literature on management and leadership and how these impact on school effectiveness have also been reviewed.

Accountability

A brief summary of the accountability of schools may give an insight into the construction of the initiative at St James' and the type of pupils identified and targeted by senior management. Once this is understood, the appropriateness of these targeted underachieving pupils and the issues of the management of the initiative can be teased out to address the research questions.

With the publication of school league tables, more pressure is now placed on schools to improve their numbers of five A* to C passes at GCSE. Schools are now becoming far more accountable and with the issues of underachievement in pupils, even more pressure is placed upon schools to identify these pupils and provide strategies to improve their performance. These strategies feed into whole school improvement and how well they are managed will arguably determine how effective the school will be.

Accountability has been top of the national education policy making agenda in recent years. Accountability forms the core of legislation of the 1980s, culminating in the Education Reform Act of 1988 (Brooman, 1994). These Education Reform Acts, fuelled by James Callaghan's famous speech at Ruskin

College in 1976, have gradually given parents a larger formal stake in the management of schools. Parents, as a result of government efforts, have moved from a shadowy position on the margins of the educational process to a position near the centre stage (Bastiani, 1989) and as such has necessitated a need for increased, clearer communication between schools and parents. Schools are therefore now becoming more accountable to a far wider audience.

Models of accountability have been discussed by many commentators, notably Kogan (1988) and Broadfoot (cited in Brooman, 1994). Today, accountability for the school is imposed, direct and visible. The role of market accountability has become ever more significant through performance indicators, consumers' choice factors and delegated budgets. As Brooman (1994) argues, out of Kogan's three normative models of accountability, the professional model today no longer pertains whilst the public and consumerist/market models dominate.

This present climate of accountability therefore, has forced the senior management team in the school under study, to reconsider its strategies for maintaining and increasing the amount of five grade A* to C passes at GCSE. This has made them face issues of underachievement in male pupils and to a lesser extent female pupils. This involved analysis of relevant pupil performance data for the identification of underachieving pupils and then the construction of appropriate target-setting strategies and their implementation. Finally, reliable monitoring and evaluation techniques of these strategies need to be devised. It is with these issues that the research questions are concerned.

School Improvement and school effectiveness

The last section looked at the current environment faced by schools and pressures placed upon them to seek out strategies to improve pupils' examination performance. These performances are then published nationally in the school league tables where schools are compared. As this particular

initiative is aimed at improving the examination performance of underachieving pupils on the C/D borderline, a review of some of the literature on what school effectiveness and improvement is thought to be, may indicate the appropriateness of the hypothesis of using pupil perceptions to improve school improvement. A discussion is also included about the appropriateness of using national tests as a way of measuring school performance and therefore whether the use of test data is the best way to measure pupils performance and identify underachievement.

Hopkins and Reynolds, (2001:459) review the three distinct phases that school improvement has passed through. In the 'first phase', initiatives were only loosely connected to student learning outcomes, were variable and fragmented in conception and application and as a consequence the practices struggled to impact upon classroom practice. The 'second phase' resulted from the interaction between the school improvement and the school effectiveness communities. The 'third phase' came about in the late 1990s due to the realisation that many of the national educational reforms produced in various countries may not have been particularly successful. Hopkins (2001:462) goes on to conclude that:

“Unless central reforms address issues to do with teaching and learning, as well as dealing with capacity-building at the school level, within a context of external support, then the aspirations of reform are unlikely to be realised.”

The 'third phase' school improvement practice and philosophy now draws on the lessons from the apparently limited achievements of existing improvements and reform. The pressures now placed upon schools to develop and improve student outcomes make it more likely that they will search out valid school improvement models. The initiative at St James' is one such example.

The authors argue that far from the 'third phase' developments being finished it is clear that there are a number of areas where further development is required (Hopkins and Reynolds 2001:469).

Harris (2001) goes a step further and argues that the current approaches to school improvement do not adequately reflect or incorporate the department level. This argument contradicts the 'top down' approach to effective school management advocated by the 'second phase'. She goes on to conclude that the department is an important 'missing link' in school improvement theory and practice. I would like to take this a step further and suggest that perhaps pupils' perceptions are also another missing link that could be used to inform school improvement theory and practice, one needing further research and consideration.

To summarise there is recent recognition that 'top-down' approaches to whole school development and change have limited impact in raising pupil performance and achievement. Recent studies confirm this viewpoint and highlight the limitations of improvement efforts that focus only upon the whole school level. The importance of focusing change at different levels within the school organisation, and the variation in effectiveness is due to variation within schools, a phenomena that I experience every day. Research evidence highlights the contribution of the department and classroom level to whole school effectiveness and the importance of change at different levels within the school which have been shown to be essential in generating and sustaining school improvement (see Harris, 2001 for full argument). From this discussion by Harris an idea for investigation formed. If departments can be assumed as being an important 'missing link' in school improvement theory and practice why not investigate another level, that of the pupils themselves and their perceptions?

Leadership was also expressed as being important in school improvement. Harris found that within all improving departments leadership was perceived as an important contributory factor in building a 'climate for change'. A clear

vision for the development of the department and an ability to share and communicate that vision then allowed developments to be taken forward and successfully implement improvements. Where this was not the case improvement proved very difficult to achieve. Therefore, it appears that leadership extends beyond the Headteacher if the school is to be effective. Perhaps now there needs to be a new perspective on leadership, one which involves a decentralised, devolved and shared approach within schools (Harris 2001:483), involving all levels within the organisation. This made me start to think about structures within the school. If, as Harris claims there should be a shared approach of leadership within school, how could the perceptions of the pupils' be elicited and heard above the voices of other levels? Perhaps the pupils could provide suggestions? Perhaps the structure of the school needed thinking about? In a later chapter I identify the Head of Year and Pastoral system as a structure present in the school that could be used for improvements as a part of a shared approach to leadership.

The current educational agenda in Britain with its national political pressure upon schools to develop and improve students' outcomes, provides a very useful setting for the further development of school improvement as a field of study. These pressures say Hopkins and Reynolds (2001) make it more likely that schools will search out valid school improvement models and insights that can help them. I would agree with this. St James has introduced an initiative aimed at identifying and improving underachieving pupils' examination performance due to the pressures of published performance data. In the absence of valid designs, though, schools may remain locked into First or Second Age improvement practices of somewhat limited value. The initiative cannot therefore stand still. It requires regular evaluation if it is to remain effective.

So what is school improvement? The literature has many definitions, a useful one is provided by Harris *et al* (1996:15):

“School improvement has been defined as a systematic, sustained effort aimed at change in learning conditions and other related internal conditions in one or more schools, with the ultimate aim of accomplishing educational goals more effectively. Or a systematic attempt to enhance teaching and learning which has its focus both in the classroom and in the school”.

Stoll and Fink (1996:42) also discuss what is meant by the term school improvement and comment on the above quote. They go on to offer their own definition of school improvement as a series of concurrent and recurring processes in which a school: enhances pupil outcomes, focuses on teaching and learning, builds the capacity to take charge of change regardless of its source, defines its own direction, assesses its current culture and works to develop positive cultural norms, has strategies to achieve its goals, addresses the internal conditions that enhance change, maintains momentum during periods of turbulence and monitors and evaluates its process, progress, achievement and development. They continue with a discussion that school improvement is unique to each school as each school’s context is unique and that schools will address these processes in different ways, so no blueprint can be proposed for all schools. This points to school improvement coming from within the school and not being set by external influences and perhaps not even solely from the “top down” approach identified by Harris (2001).

The school under study is looking to raise examination performance, especially at the D/C boundary. It would be interesting to discover in a future evaluation if it considers this to be its total contribution to “school improvement” or is it just a part of the whole process of its strategy for school improvement?

This then brings us to the issue of how effective are schools? There appears to be no common definition for school effectiveness and as Stoll and Fink (1996:26) point out herein lies a fundamental problem of school effectiveness.

What does it actually mean and does it mean the same thing to different people? They go on to quote a definition by Levine and Lezotte (1990) that effectiveness is the production of a desired result or outcome. Desired by whom? Schools are complex organisations where different members of the organisation, pupils', parents', and governors' views on important outcomes may not coincide with those of the educators. This could add to the argument that these members' views need to be solicited, not only to improve the outcomes of the pupils' examination results but also to promote school improvement and effectiveness. At the school level then, all those concerned need to come to a shared definition and agreement on expected and desired outcomes, another argument that led me to consider the importance of pupil perceptions about their schooling and how they feel that it could be improved.

Mortimore (1991:9) summarises that an effective school is one in which pupils progress further than might be expected from consideration of its intake. That is the value added by the school over and above what the pupil brings in terms of prior attainment and background factors. Thus statistical predictions of what pupils might be expected to achieve later based on background and earlier attainment can be calculated. Where pupils exceed these predictions, then 'value added' has been achieved. Researchers (Mortimore, 1991:9) and I have found teachers appear to differ on whether school effectiveness should focus on those pupils who are 'at risk' or on quality for all children. This is the dilemma I find myself in, especially with this initiative to improve the performance of pupils targeted on the D/C examination grade borderline. This decision to target these pupils I consider to be due to a number of factors. External political pressure to perform well in the published school league performance tables, a lack of time and money and qualified staff to target all pupils all contribute to the decision to identify those pupils whose grades if targeted would improve the school's standing in these school league tables.

My ideal would be the definition of an effective school given by Stoll and Fink (1996:28) where a school is effective if it promotes progress for all of its pupils beyond what is expected given consideration of initial attainment and

background factors. In other words it ensures that each pupil achieves the highest standards possible and it enhances all aspects of pupil achievement and development as well as continuing to improve from year to year. It must be remembered that this initiative is only targeting one set of pupils and that to be really effective all pupils should be included. This also led me to consider the timing of the initiative, and if it was taking place at the most effective time in the pupils' careers.

As already pointed out performance and accountability were the watchwords of the 1990s. It appeared that the thinking was, that improvement would happen if pupils were just tested and schools and teachers were made accountable for the products of schooling. An example of this is the construction of the school league tables where pupils' results are used to describe the product of their education. According to Stoll and Fink (1996:166) there is very little evidence that external assessment actually improves the quality of education and they point to the evidence of its negative effect on teaching.

I believe that evaluation in schools is vital for school improvement and also for school effectiveness. Indeed Stoll and Fink (1996:168) believe that the key purposes for any judgements of school quality should be to ensure that it: promotes school self accountability, provides useful indications of what works well and what needs to be improved, guarantees equal opportunities for all pupils, determines trends in schools' effectiveness and improvement over time and also leads to further development, not only for the school but for use in other schools. These are very important issues and show just how critical the evaluation of the initiative is if it is to move the school forward.

One of the most common ways of measuring a school's performance then, is by its examination results. The reason for this is two-fold. First, most of the population believes that one of the functions of schooling is to impart knowledge, understanding and skills and that this is best assessed by some form of test or examination even if these skills are not adequately tested by formal examination means. Secondly, and linked to the first argument, the

examinations are public examinations, ie: the results are in the public domain, particularly so since the government has insisted on their publication in a certain format (Harris *et al* 1996:10).

There now follows a brief discussion about the effectiveness of using pupil performance data for judging the school and more importantly for using this performance data solely to identify underachieving pupils.

After the 1980's accountability became associated with the performance of individual schools, the focus narrowing from issues of the difference in performance between boys and girls to simple comparisons of schools in terms of average scores in a small number of key skills. More recently these comparisons have become associated with achievement targets and used as a means of allocating resources towards individual schools via appraisal, performance management and promotion procedures. (Goldstein 2001:433).

The basis for 'league tables', rankings of schools published nationally and locally by the media come from the publication of test and examination results for every school at Key Stages 2, 4 and A-level. There is now a recognition of the severe limitations of such raw comparisons, which fail to take into account the prior intake achievements of pupils, and a recent innovation is the provision of limited 'value added' data from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4.

This project is looking at one school's response to school improvement by identifying underachieving pupils using test, assessment and examination performance and comparing it to various analytical tools like YELLIS (Year Eleven Information System) in order to target these pupils by means of setting mentor/mentee agreed targets. This is then implemented through an action plan for achieving the outcome of improved examination performance. This whole school initiative however, is based on the assumption that underachieving pupils can be identified through test based assessments, and this alone, and that the most effective time to do this is at the beginning of Year 11. Studies by

Rutter *et al*, 1979 and Mortimore *et al*, 1988 indicate that there are *other* performance indicators that can be used to identify underachieving pupils as well as external examination results these being:

- progress in academic subjects
- attendance, delinquency, behaviour
- attitude to learning
- staying on rate, success in gaining employment
- parental satisfaction

But, there are problems in defining these to enable consistency between researchers. However, a set of criteria could be constructed for use with pupils at St James' that could then be refined every year after appropriate evaluation has taken place.

Researchers generally agree that something like half the differences in pupils' performances can be attributed to the socio-economic background factors. In view of these consistent findings it is clearly not very sensible to use raw examinations or test result to assess effectiveness for either internal or external purposes. What schools want to know therefore is: how effective have they been with the students they have in school? It should be possible to refine this question further to: how effective have particular departments been in the school with individual students?; or even, how effective have individual teachers been with individual students? (Harris *et al* 1996:10).

To summarise, as Harris (2001:482) points out school improvement and effectiveness can be moved on by considering change not just at management level but also at different levels within the school. I would suggest that the perceptions of pupils on their education would also impact significantly on school improvement and effectiveness.

Value-added data

Perhaps a more effective way of comparing schools and pupils is using value added data. Levacic (1994), looked at how value-added data can contribute to school effectiveness and provides a very useful study of how a school can develop its own value added performance indicators. It also discusses issues of data handling and the management issues related to how value added performance indicators are used to assess and improve student, department and teacher performance.

She also points out that raw examination results that take no notice of the students' social background and ability are totally unreliable as a measure of school performance (1994: 55). As a result the publication of raw results in "league tables" has awakened a much greater interest in obtaining "value added measures of examination performance". These value-added measures can be constructed to take account of the effect on examination results of pupils' social background, ability and other factors such as gender.

Value added then is important as it refers to the amount the individual school contributes to a student's educational outcomes once allowance has been made for the effects of social background, prior attainment, gender and any other factors which are not directly controlled by the school. They therefore look at a set of quantifiable factors. If schools use value added indicators of their own student performance then the indicators can become part of an internal management information system, which has the potential for improving student achievement. This may possibly be a way forward for St James'.

However, these types of indicators do have some problems:

- How good is the construct validity? That is do they really measure what they set out to measure? There could be problems with the accuracy of entry of assessment data. The initial tests used to assess attainment at entry

may be inappropriate (Levacic 1994:64). The indicator also makes no allowances for national differences in examination grades across subjects.

- How effective will they really be if they are seen by teachers as a tool to measure teacher performance? There are also problems here if a group is taught by more than one member of staff for a particular subject, this is relevant in science at St James' where an upper school group is taught by three separate science subject specialists.

Levacic (1994: 64) goes on to point out that with these problems of construct validity the performance indicators must be used sensitively and sensibly to stimulate questions about the factors influencing student, teacher and departmental performance and not as hard evidence with little interpretation.

The benefits of value added as indicators of performance can therefore be summarised in the following ways:

- The measure shows whether the results of the pupils are as good as can be expected, or better or worse given the prior attainment, social background and other externally determined student characteristics.
- Value added measures can indicate different performance in different curriculum areas and so can become an effective management tool in raising pupil, teacher and departmental achievement.
- Value added measures are performance indicators, which can be used in securing improved performance from students and teachers.

As already pointed out, the school under study is amassing a lot of assessment data with the YELLIS assessments and currently thinking of introducing MIDYIS (Middle Year Information System) tests for Year 7 pupils to collect still further assessment data for constructing target grades. Exactly how the school will use this data and if it will provide value for money is not yet clear and provides another interesting line of enquiry. Also, should the senior management team be looking into ways of determining value added as a more

effective way to identify underachieving pupils? Although outside the scope of this dissertation, it is a question worth raising for future consideration.

A cautionary note is struck by Fielding (1999) who found that when target setting was used to motivate pupils the pupils expressed doubts about the genuineness of their school's interest in their progress and well being as persons, as distinct from their contributions to the school league table position. This highlights the presumption that careful thought, rigorous planning and a degree of consultation are adequate guarantors of success. Whilst all these things are, without doubt, important, the major failing of such a list is its conspicuous lack of engagement with the very people who are the objects of policy change. Therefore targets need to be relevant and meaningful for all those involved and more evidence for the urgency of considering the perceptions of pupils.

Much of the debate about school effectiveness pivots round a set of output indicators that are in the public consciousness and are, therefore, almost bound to surface in any discussion about effectiveness indicators. The indicators are as already identified: examination and test results; truancy rates; staying on in post-16 education and destination data. These are all output indicators in the sense that to some extent they are the result of what happens inside the institution.

There are other types of indicators however, that institutions might consider. One, which is of interest to this study, is a variety of what Harris *et al* (1996: 9) call satisfaction indicators. That is, an institution might wish to see whether the different constituencies, which it serves, are satisfied with both what the institution achieves and how it achieves it, in other words the views of its pupils and their parents.

School Improvement and Pupil perceptions

Why then a study on school improvement based on the pupils' perspectives?

How much could these perceptions contribute to school improvement? There now follows a discussion on the potential importance of pupil perceptions.

There is a lot of literature on school improvement that centres on pupils and their attainments, there is little literature to suggest that the analyses of these situations have taken into account the critiques which pupils can offer. It is not suggested in any of these accounts that schools could start to improve by inviting pupils to talk about:

- what makes learning difficult for them
- what diminishes their motivation and engagement
- what makes some give up
- what makes others settle for a minimum even though they know that doing well matters (Phelan 1992:4)

All of these appear to me to be important questions to be asking on the issue of underachievement, and perhaps the best people to ask are the pupils themselves.

Indeed, in their study on school improvement Rudduck *et al* (1996: 1) argue that what pupils say about teaching, learning and schooling is not only worth listening to but provides an important, perhaps most important, foundation for thinking about ways of improving schools. Also, that the conditions of learning do not adequately take account of the social maturity of young people, nor of the tensions and pressures they feel as they struggle to reconcile the demands of their social and personal lives with the development of their identity as learners. Nieto (1994:396) who claims that one way to begin the process of changing school policies is to listen to students' views about them confirms this.

However, research that focuses on the student voice is relatively recent and scarce and pupils' perspectives are missing in discussions concerning strategies for confronting educational problems. She goes on to point out that the voice of students is rarely heard in the debate about school failure and success, she does

not suggest that pupils' ideas should be final and conclusive, but that their accounts of experience should be heard and taken seriously in debates about learning in secondary schools (1994:398). This is a view echoed by Soo Hoo (1993:392), who claims that traditionally, students have been overlooked as valuable resources in the restructuring of schools'. Phelan *et al* (1992:696) argue that it is important to give more attention to students' views of things that affect their learning in school. They found out they have a lot to say about:

- schooling and classroom conditions
- how students feel about themselves as learners and members of the school community
- perceptions of the school as an educational and social setting

An analysis by Grey *et al* (1993) cited in Hopkins *et al* (1994) on ways that schools could respond to patterns of underachievement identifies some useful short-term tactics and long term tactics but does not indicate involvement of pupils at a classroom level. Hopkins *et al* (1994) list of conditions for school improvement seems almost entirely concerned with teachers. Another list constructed by Sammons *et al* (1994:6) does mention pupil involvement but adds that there are problems with the contribution of pupil voices in school improvement:

1. the personalised nature of comments, they talk about school, subject teaching, teachers, which are not always appreciative.
2. pupils are not given credit to make constructive judgements about aspects of their schooling. (Sammons *et al* 1994:8).

However, most young people are observant, are often capable of analytic and constructive comment and usually respond well to the responsibility of helping to identify aspects of schooling that get in the way of their learning. They also find themselves in the perfect position, being 'consumers' of education, to comment and provide feedback about what is happening to them and how they feel that things could be improved. The challenge for schools will be to have the courage, and time, to solicit pupils' perceptions and then to make use of

them in policy formulation. This seems to be a good reason therefore to investigate pupils' perceptions in this dissertation.

As Phelan *et al* (1992) point out there are lots of pupil-oriented concerns and targets, eg; lifting pupil attainment, raising expectations, enhancing pupils' self-esteem and morale. Pupils are the key points of reference. It is illogical if the very people at the heart of these initiatives are not consulted about the things that may be done to help them to achieve.

In the initiative described in this thesis, the pupils have not been consulted along the way. Test, assessment and examination performance have been analysed and pupils identified from this information as underachievers, depending on how far away their actual examination performance in their mocks is from their predicted levels calculated by the YELLIS tests. Just how accurate the predictions made by YELLIS are remains to be seen as the initiative is still in its infancy. A lot of weight however, is being placed on these predictions by the senior management team at St. James' into the identification of underachieving pupils and because of this a comparison of this and the pupils actual achievement takes place later in the dissertation.

Rudduck (1996:23) has touched on the issue of identification of underachieving students too late in their school career confirming my concerns of the lateness of implementation of this initiative and the need to investigate this further. If pupils were not helped to develop a clear understanding of what was at stake early on, they found later that they had unwittingly been storing up problems for themselves eg; absence from school and the problems involved with catching up on work missed and homework. She found that illness apart, some are failing to build firm foundations of knowledge and practice because of:

1. being vulnerable in class to peer group pressure to 'muck about'.
2. bullying resulting in them being absent (bullying physical and or verbal) and were therefore falling behind with their work.

If pupils have the impression that missing work does not seem to be a 'big deal' then they are likely to under-estimate the importance of the continuities of learning. There is an implication here that teachers (and also schools) should make more of an issue of pupils catching up missed work on a formal basis, after-school classes for example, rather than leaving it as the responsibility of the pupil to catch up. The completion of missing work needs to be made a priority by the senior managers but structured time has to be made available for its completion. Also, if good homework habits are not established early on in the school career, it will be very difficult to adjust to the steep incline in demands of managing time and multiple tasks of Yr10 and Yr11 (Rudduck 1996:24). This is all evidence to me that the current school policy of identification of underachieving pupils has been left too late by the senior management of the school, and that by evaluating the perceptions of the pupils in the school this might be confirmed.

Wallace (1996:67) suggests that the way the curriculum is approached leads to two types of learning in schools which make different demands on pupils:

- engagement engendered by schoolwork, which offers interest, novelty, challenge and significant personal control over the process (for years 7, 8 and 9).
- instrumental covering of syllabus and rote learning for exams (for years 10 and 11).

Wallace (1996:68), goes on to pose the following question:

“Should school work be about learning how to learn for self-development in a social world oriented to mutual respect and support? Or is it about competitive individualism tied to individual self-interest and fragmented, competencies, outputs, which promise (debatable) levels of achievement that can be readily measured?”

To summarise Wallace, in years 7, 8 and 9 learning is for interest and satisfaction however, in years 10 and 11 this 'learning for interest' becomes less important and role oriented behaviour and the importance of end grades redefines the meaning pupils, and staff, give to their learning activities. This could mean that pupils are now encouraged to react with self-interest, but these pressures could have the opposite effect leading to disruption or could even cause them to switch off (Wallace 1996:68). This again, could be pointing to the fact that underachievement may happen much earlier in a pupil's school career but also that the construction of the curriculum itself may be partly responsible for the underachievement.

Another issue that affects underachievers is that of what it means to work hard. Pupils recognise they have to work hard to do really well, but as Kersher (1996: 70) points out, does this mean, increasing their efforts or to change their whole approach to study?

As already stated there are two possible explanations as to why pupils work hard:

- intrinsic motivation (pursuing an interest)
- extrinsic motivation (completing a task to receive a qualification)

Lack of motivation or effort, may relate to individual pupils' perceptions of the likelihood of their being successful in particular tasks, or the lack of value placed on school work so that even apparently strongly motivated pupils may be depending on extrinsic rewards to maintain their motivation (Kersher 1996:74). Some well-motivated pupils may not know how to apply themselves in the most effective way and are likely to have difficulties in maintaining their efforts in the face of disappointing results. So why work hard then?

Pupils feel that:

- they need to work hard to get good results and a good job.
- they had to make the decision to work hard for themselves.

Kersher also found that there is variable achievement with pupils who are motivated extrinsically and there is high achievement with pupils who are motivated intrinsically (1996:75). This appears to be directly supporting the findings of Wallace and that it is the approach to the type of learning at the different key stages that may contribute to the disillusionment and eventual underachievement of certain pupils. However, this information does tend to support the view that underachievement may only become a real issue at Key Stage 4 rather than earlier which is contrary to my perception of the situation at St. James'.

However, pupils said that they work hardest at the things they liked (intrinsic) and saw the purpose in (Kersher 1996:75) no matter at what stage of their school career. These findings appear to indicate that underachievement may well manifest itself earlier than Year 11 in a pupil's school career.

Gender Issues

The previous section looked at possible reasons why pupils and their perceptions of their schooling should be investigated and the possibility that underachievement may partly be due to the construction of the curriculum and may occur before it is targeted by the initiative at St James'. This next section discusses another major issue facing effectiveness in schools, the so-called "gender gap" (Younger, 1999) which is variously constructed as resulting from some boys' disregard for authority, academic work and formal achievement. Francis (1999:2) comments on this phenomena wondering if it is in fact more complex than just gender. She refers to three popular discourses used in the popular press to explain some boys' educational failure:

- Poor boys
- Failing schools
- Boys will be boys

Low educational achievement in boys is therefore seen as a result of external factors, the teacher, school and teaching methods.

Younger (1999) goes on to point out that girls mature earlier, having more effective learning strategies making them more confident as self learners and are therefore more inclined to take the initiative in promoting their own learning. Boys offer defensive rationales for their behaviour having critical perceptions of teachers' attitudes to them as boys. Boys appear to be more disordered, demotivated, less willing to prioritise their school work, are more vocal, boisterous, less advanced than girls and more easily distracted. The boys appear to be more concerned with their peer group image and challenge both the relevance of education offered and the ethos of the school. The reason given for this was that boys have other interests which they feel are more important than school (Younger, 1999:2). It would be interesting therefore to see if pupils confirm this at St James' when investigating the occurrence of underachievement.

The atmosphere within the classroom was more likely to be influenced by the boys with them failing to bring the right equipment, forgetting books, taking longer to settle down and being disorganised with coursework. Younger (1999) goes on to state that boys are more disruptive, disinterested, in need of more prompting and in need of more support in their learning. He found that boys were reprimanded more than girls and dominated teacher student interactions. The boys had more questions directed at them but asked fewer questions than the girls, being less inquisitive. The boys also received more negative comments than the girls did. We do not know if this is because they misbehave more or if there is greater tolerance of girl misbehaviour, leading to male disillusionment and so a negative reaction to learning by the boys. Also, we are not told the size of the group of the boys this study refers to. Is it every boy and if so can this be generalised to all boys, or is it just a small number of individuals, or even just one boy, who affect the dynamics of the whole class? Is it the same boy who was reprimanded every time or were a greater number of

boys in the group reprimanded than girls. What are the pupils' own perceptions on these matters? Were they asked? If not why were they not asked? Could their contribution help explain what was happening in the group, offer explanations as to why it was happening. Finally could they not offer solutions to these identified criticisms?

Chaplain (1996:101) also found that male pupils felt that the work they did was not valued by teachers. This perhaps is one of the areas that needs further investigation. Why do male pupils perceive that this is how teachers, parents and peers view their work? He goes on to explain that a pupil's lack of motivation to achieve is not simply related to ability but is influenced by personal and inter-personal processes, eg: Thomson (1994:259):

“All too familiar to educators...is the student who consistently underachieves despite an apparent ability to cope with the demands of his or her studies. Such behaviour may cloak a pattern of self- worth protection in student achievement motivation”.

Gender and underachievement have been identified as a major issue in school effectiveness with boys tending to underachieve more than girls. Is this the case at St James'? These questions provide useful insight to the construction of a questionnaire and design for interview questions.

Motivation

The last section discussed the issues of gender and underachievement. This next one examines motivation in pupils and considers that motivation may have a direct bearing on underachievement especially in boys. The motivation to protect their self- worth may well result in pupils using a range of tactics to avoid damage to their self- esteem, which in turn may lead to under achievement. Self- worth has been described as the tendency to establish and

maintain a positive self- image (Chaplain 1996). Therefore, self- worth can be related to ability. To be able may be perceived by pupils to be valued, to do poorly may therefore, be perceived by a pupil as evidence of his inability and therefore may adversely affect the pupil's self- worth (Chaplain 1996:102).

Protecting self- esteem and maintaining social identity and or maintaining street credibility can become more important for the male pupil than securing a good education. It is therefore not cool for disengaged boys to be seen to be paying serious attention to schoolwork or homework. This is a dilemma for some boys who may wish to do well but cultivate a negative attitude towards their education in order to be accepted by peers whom they feel to be important. To address this situation boys may have to be coaxed to work so there is no loss of face in front of these peers.

Added to this then is the perception that disengaged male pupils feel they are not treated fairly (they are getting the blame for things they haven't done). It therefore becomes difficult for them to change their image, and so they argue that there is little point doing work. Chaplain (1996:107) also found that the perceived situation became more aggravated when disengaged male pupils felt that girls were given more help and that male pupils then lost interest and gave up.

Teachers also play a large role in a pupil's perceived self-worth. Teachers who are prepared to listen, are understanding, approachable, fair and do not humiliate are very important to pupils although, the image of the disengaged pupil is not to ask for help. This tension therefore, is an area that would be useful to target in the questionnaire. As well as constructing an image in front of their peers, this very group may also have a negative effect on pupils' self worth, both male and female, through bullying and name-calling (Chaplain 1996:108).

Chaplain's 1996 study of Years 8 and 9 pupils, found that engaged pupils' positive self- image improve, as they grow older, whereas disengaged pupils'

(low self- esteem) negative feelings strengthened as they grow older (Chaplain 1996:110). This tends to support the hypothesis that the strategy of targeting pupils in the school under study starts too late in Year 11 and that perhaps looking to strategies in lower years would be far more profitable in terms of improving pupil performance and one aspect of school effectiveness.

Chaplain finally concludes with six findings of disengaged pupils' perceptions of themselves (see Chaplain 1996:112). Briefly they have been summarised as follows:

Disengaged pupils seem to have lower self-esteem than their engaged peers. They dislike subjects with lots of writing (eg: English), and subjects they do not understand (eg: Modern Languages). They also have increased anxiety about their ability, because of their earlier poor performances. They are more likely to be involved in bullying incidences, and feel under pressure from friends if they exhibit achievement behaviour. They are perceived by many of their engaged peers as a hindrance and an annoyance. They perceive teachers as generally unfair to pupils, but particularly unfair to them. They tend to show high levels of anxiety about their future chances in a working world, but want exam success seeing a direct relationship between exam results and getting a job.

These six points if investigated over the different year groups at St James' may help to pinpoint in their academic career exactly when underachievement occurs. This then may help the SMT to direct their initiatives more effectively for the pupils. These six points could therefore help form the basis of a questionnaire and a series of interviews.

In summary, it appears that pupils' perceptions of themselves as learners, the education provided and ways for improving their performance could provide a valuable insight into the problems of underachievement and help with strategies for improving the performance of all pupils and as a consequence affect school effectiveness and improvement.

Management issues

The next two sections look at management and leadership and discuss different models of management in order to try and establish the management strategy and leadership style operating at St James'. Thus identified, the position of evaluation at St James' in the management cycle may be more easily discernable together with its role within the implementation of this initiative. This then may also provide an insight into how successfully managed this initiative has been.

So how is this strategy of improving pupils' examination performance going to be managed? As far back as 1996 the School Development Plan identifies the need for the "promotion of individual counseling for pupils" as they progress through the school, this to be in place by September 1997. Under 'resource and financial implications', time is identified as a constraining factor. Investigating the implementation of the process and people's perceptions of this will hopefully give an insight to the management philosophy of change by the senior management team and its apparent success.

Leigh (1994), identified two types of change, strategic and operational. As this is going to be a long-term implementation of an innovation both types of change will be apparent. The long term change is strategic, and the day to day change is operational. How this change is to be managed will affect the outcome of the initiative and whether it is successful or not at raising the examination performance of those pupils identified as underachieving.

Leigh then goes on to suggest that change has different dimensions:- political, cultural and technical and develops a view that a manager is a leader in bringing about change. Marsh (1994) continues on the three dimensions of change. He looks at three 'school improvement models'. The Collaborative School Management Model which is strongly orientated towards the technological perspective, but not entirely. The Action Research Model which is closely aligned to the political perspective but is also associated with the Cultural, and

the Person-Centred Action which appears to straddle the political and the technological perspectives.

Attwell (1994) found that the management of change was a complex process. Early on it was easy to control the areas of activity centrally, but as the project grew it became increasingly more difficult to maintain such control. The innovation was however, on a much larger scale than the present project but the study does highlight the complexity of assessing, measuring and evaluating the management of change.

Richards (1994) in her study as an internal consultant looked at the management of curriculum change driven by requirements from central government and concluded that a dynamic approach to implementation was best able to cope with the constant changes from central government.

In her study Godsmark (1994) researched the implementation of an innovation and tried to see if it matched up with Wallace's (1992) rationalistic planning model which is founded on sequential steps. Briefly:

- 1) establishing agreement upon fundamental values
- 2) clarifying goals
- 3) identifying a range of possible strategies
- 4) analysing all relevant facts
- 5) making best possible decisions

However, this model assumes all goals are clear and consistent and all factors are known. She found that there was a very minimalist approach to planning in her school, and that formal monitoring was needed for the approach to simulate Wallace's.

Based on this information the research may also be able to:

- identify which model (or models) is being used in the implementation process
- why this model (or models) is being used in the implementation process

- is it the most appropriate one to use?

Leaders and effective schools

This section examines the debate over effective schools and their leadership. The initiative at St James' concerned with raising the performance of underachievers could be considered to be a part of making a school more effective. But what is effectiveness and can pupils' perceptions on their schooling play a role in the improvement of schools? Leaders and leadership arguably make the difference in establishing and maintaining successful schools.

There is a distinctive wisdom about teaching among practicing teachers but that wisdom is often isolated and unvoiced and when teachers work in lonely circumstances it makes it difficult for them to articulate what they know and share what they have learned with their peers. The role of the head then, is to create a school culture of reflective practice in which understanding achieved during the course of practice are nurtured and not forgotten. (Sergiovanni, 2001:103).

Sergiovanni thinks of schools as "complex adaptive systems" (2001:101). They are self managing in the sense that the systems consist of webs or networks of agents or components that act independently of each other without guidance from any form of central control. Yet they are able to engage in co-operative behaviour that is not work of a collection of 'Is' but a coming together of a 'We'. This requires a good leader so that the school pulls in the same direction, however the direction of the school must be made clear and agreed by all participants for this to work.

Sergiovanni quotes Freedman's (1992) particular type of feedback that makes self management possible. In a sense, self-organising systems are learning systems but of a specific source. They are capable of learning through feedback

from their external environment. They also embed that learning in their actual structure.

Sergiovanni goes on to conclude that most successful schools are those where teachers feel a sense of ownership and responsibility:-the common element for success is a caring, focused group of teachers and students who trust one another and work together as a community with a common purpose (2001:129).

As discussed in a previous section, a lot of external pressure is placed on educational institutions to become more efficient and more effective. The quasi-market fuelled by the school league tables has heightened competition between schools and to a lesser extent, from my own observations, between departments within schools. It can be observed that this movement, perhaps even drive, towards educational effectiveness and improvement is becoming increasingly more important and pressured. It could therefore be argued that this 'drive' results in increasing management responsibility and accountability requiring higher level management and leadership skills at all levels within schools (Harris *et al*, 1996:1). This could lead to flatter structures with responsibilities being more widely shared. Could this open the way to effective management becoming central to the professional development of all teachers?

Organisational effectiveness and improvement appear to be dependant upon the particular theoretical position adopted (Harris *et al*, 1996:2). Therefore, different and sometimes competing theoretical views on management and organisational effectiveness emerge.

Effective schools offer the possibility of improving the school and perhaps other schools. Effectiveness is essentially related to achieving goals in education. It deals with why schools with initially comparable pupils differ in the extent in which they achieve their goals.

Creemers (1997:80) describes an open system model of management which is central to the school. This model emphasises the effective transformation of

inputs into outputs and underlines the importance of value-added measurement. The inputs are variables like financial, personal resources and background of the pupils. The context refers to the socio-economic, political and educational contexts of the school. The process are those factors (particularly at classroom level) which affect the quality of teaching and learning. In an open-system model the management is primarily concerned with ensuring that the outputs meet expectations and that individuals work together in a coordinated way to achieve them.

If the management is perceived as influencing or modifying the behaviour of others then power becomes an important factor. However, power and influence are only real if they are accepted by those over whom it is being exercised. Power relationships within organisations become important factors in affecting change. For effective management to take place the culture of the organisation needs to be considered.

Creemers needs to go further. Yes the future of effective instruction is in the hands of the teaching profession and teachers have to take responsibility for the learning processes and outcomes of their students. This is something that I would argue that they, the teachers, have always wanted. Perhaps this is an argument for more autonomy for the teaching profession?

Creemers describes four levels in his conceptual framework for a model of educational effectiveness (1997:114), those of student level, classroom level, school level and context level. The student level describes the students' backgrounds, motivation and aptitudes. At the classroom level the quality of instruction is also an important factor in determining the outcomes of education and Creemers goes on to discuss curriculum factors, grouping procedures and teacher behaviour (1997:117). At the school level, Creemers describes the quality of instruction with respect to educational aspects for example, rules and evaluation; quality of instruction with respect to organisational aspects for example school policy and culture; conditions for time for example timetabling, homework provision and school atmosphere; and conditions for the opportunity

to learn for example curriculum, school mission and rules and agreements on how to proceed. At the context level, quality for learning refers to the following conditions, a national policy that focuses on the effectiveness of learning; national testing/evaluation/indicator systems; training and support systems to promote effective schools and instruction and funding of schools based on outcomes. What is not mentioned in this model of educational effectiveness are those irritating factors that affect effective instruction on a daily basis and therefore ultimately school improvement and effectiveness. The teacher/pupil interaction identified by Creemers as so important in educational effectiveness is dependant on things like, what day it is, when in the day the lesson is, what subject lesson has gone before or comes after, what teacher has taught before or after, the pupils' perception of the subject and/or of the teacher.

All of this seems to be very remote from Creemers model, but teaching and learning is based upon relationships, relationships between teacher and pupil, pupils and teacher, pupil and pupil and also pupil and other pupils in the group. Perhaps we should be looking at why a particular teacher is more effective, why a subject is more effective, why a particular department is more effective than others in the school and why certain pupils are more successful. Rather than identifying effective schools and researching why they are successful to create models that may or may not fit other schools, why not approach the effectiveness question from a down up perspective as suggested by Harris (2001:482)?

Other questions that often come to mind are: just how much more can schools improve? And just how much more effective can they become? It is like when Roger Bannister ran the four minute mile, his time has been improved upon over the years but just how much faster can humans run a mile? There must come a point where it becomes physically impossible to run any faster, and I suspect that this is the same for school effectiveness and improvement. The answer, though far from ideal, is to keep striving for improvement and to keep looking for ways for schools to become more effective in the education of the

pupils in their care, in the case of St James' perhaps this initiative needs to be extended and dovetailed into other cohorts.

Scheerens points out that there is a general belief that 'improving' coordination structures and mechanisms within school organisations is one of the keys to effectiveness, the general hypothesis being that more integrated rather than more segmented school organisations are more effective. He goes on to discuss three models of cooperation within educational organisations 'organised anarchies', 'loose coupling' and the 'professional bureaucracy' (1997:81).

Scheerens from this discussion concludes that the message is that effective schools are those with a large percentage of effective teachers, and that levers to enhance effectiveness should be sought by appealing to professional values and the mission of teaching, rather than through rationalisation, technology or monetary incentives (1997:85).

Bush (1995) also discusses six models that represent different ways of looking at educational institutions; Formal, Collegial, Political, Subjective, Ambiguity and Cultural, and produces a table summarising the elements of management for each model (*Figure 3:1*, Bush 1995:147).

So, for a self improving school it is thought there needs to be elements of collegial and cultural models combined with a strong professional development culture. Which element or elements does St James' have, if any? Which does it need to adopt in order to improve?

If we compare the process of implementation of the initiative to the information in Bush's table we may be able to identify the management models in use at St. James and if these are the most suitable, perhaps even being able to make suggestions for effective change.

Figure 2:1 A table summarising the elements of management for each model (Bush 1995:147).

<u>Elements of management</u>	<u>Type of model</u>					
	Formal	Collegial	Political	Subjective	Ambiguity	Cultural
Levels at which goals are determined.	Institutional	Institutional	Subunit	Individual	Unclear	Institutional or subunit.
Process by which goals are determined.	Set by leaders	Agreement	Conflict	Problematic May be imposed by leaders	Unpredictable	Based on collective values
Relationships between goals and decisions	Decisions based on goals	Decisions based on agreed goals	Decisions based on goals of dominant coalitions	Individual behaviour based on personal objectives	Decisions unrelated to goals	Decisions based on goals of the organisation or its subunits
Nature of decision process	Rational	Collegial	Political	Personal	Garbage can	Rational within a framework of values
Nature of structure	Objective reality Hierarchical	Objective reality Lateral	Setting for subunit conflict	Constructed through human interaction	Problematic	Physical manifestation of culture
Links with environment	May be 'closed' or 'open' Head accountable	Accountability blurred by shared decision making	Unstable external bodies portrayed as interest groups	Source of individual meanings	Source of uncertainty	Source of values and beliefs
Style of Leadership	Head establishes goals and initiates policy	Head seeks to promote consensus	Head is both participant and mediator	Problematic May be perceived as a form of control	May be tactical or unobtrusive	Symbolic

Literature review summary

Accountability is placing more pressure on schools to improve their success in a narrow grade band. This makes the identification of pupils within this band and just below and the implementation of strategies to improve their performance in the examinations vital if the school wishes to improve its ratings in the school league tables. But does position in the school league tables make it an effective school? There arises a moral dilemma for schools when targeting pupils on the D/C boundary, as is the case with St James'. If a school is to be effective it can be described as one that promotes progress beyond what is expected of all its pupils. Success in the league tables may therefore be described as being effective to those pupils with 5A*-C grades, but what about the rest of the pupils, in the case of St James' around 40%? It is easy to see how schools can get carried away by initiatives and strategies for pupils' examination improvement on the D/C border and neglect the lower and higher achieving pupils. It could be argued that the imposition of school league tables is making schools less effective because schools are concentrating on a narrow band of pupils in order to satisfy market accountability (Brooman, 1994) in the form of school league performance tables.

On the other hand it has been argued by Hopkins and Reynolds (2001) that under these very pressures, schools will seek out models for school improvement, in the case of the school under study, an initiative to increase the examination performance of underachieving pupils. How this should occur is still an area for debate. Current approaches to school improvement and effectiveness research, appears to have had a top down approach. This approach has been challenged recently by Harris (2001) suggesting that a more effective way forward for schools is to look at the department level and using their successes to inform whole school improvement. These successes, which have been shown to be effective by the department, can then be adopted and revised in each department within the school. These would now generate a whole school strategy that is beneficial for all pupils, and not just those targeted on the D/C borderline, perhaps the school moving towards being more

effective, and not operating isolated strategies targeting small groups of pupils. These strategies could then operate over all year groups generating an overall picture of pupils' performance and achievement as they progress through the years instead of leaving identification and addressing the issue with two terms to go before the GCSE examinations.

A measure of comparing schools then is by using GCSE performance. This has been shown to be a crude and unreliable way with which to form judgements. Is this the case too for the identification of underachieving pupils? This has led to some schools using value added as a more reliable way of assessing their effectiveness and also as a way for comparison with other schools, although there are problems with these systems too like construct validity and how staff perceive them as being used by senior management.

With the percentage of pupils achieving 5A*-C grades forming much of the basis for the comparison of schools, teachers are faced with an ever growing problem of some disaffected boys in the classroom. There appears to be a culture in schools where it is seen by some boys as not being cool to learn. This may be due to peer pressure but there also seems to be a certain amount of preparing the ground for failure seen especially in boys. Ways need to be found of targeting disaffected boys to make lessons more relevant and interesting for this group of pupils. Added to this are growing numbers of underachieving pupils both male and female that require early identification, perhaps earlier than Year 11, targeting with improvement strategies and monitoring of their achievement. This can be achieved by senior management strategies or development of departmental programmes that can then be developed into whole school initiatives.

The literature points to the importance of monitoring and evaluation as being an integral part of the management cycle. These two parts are perhaps the least well done due to a variety of reasons for example: once one initiative is implemented there is little time for the evaluation as the next initiative is waiting to be implemented. However, evaluation is a vital part of the school

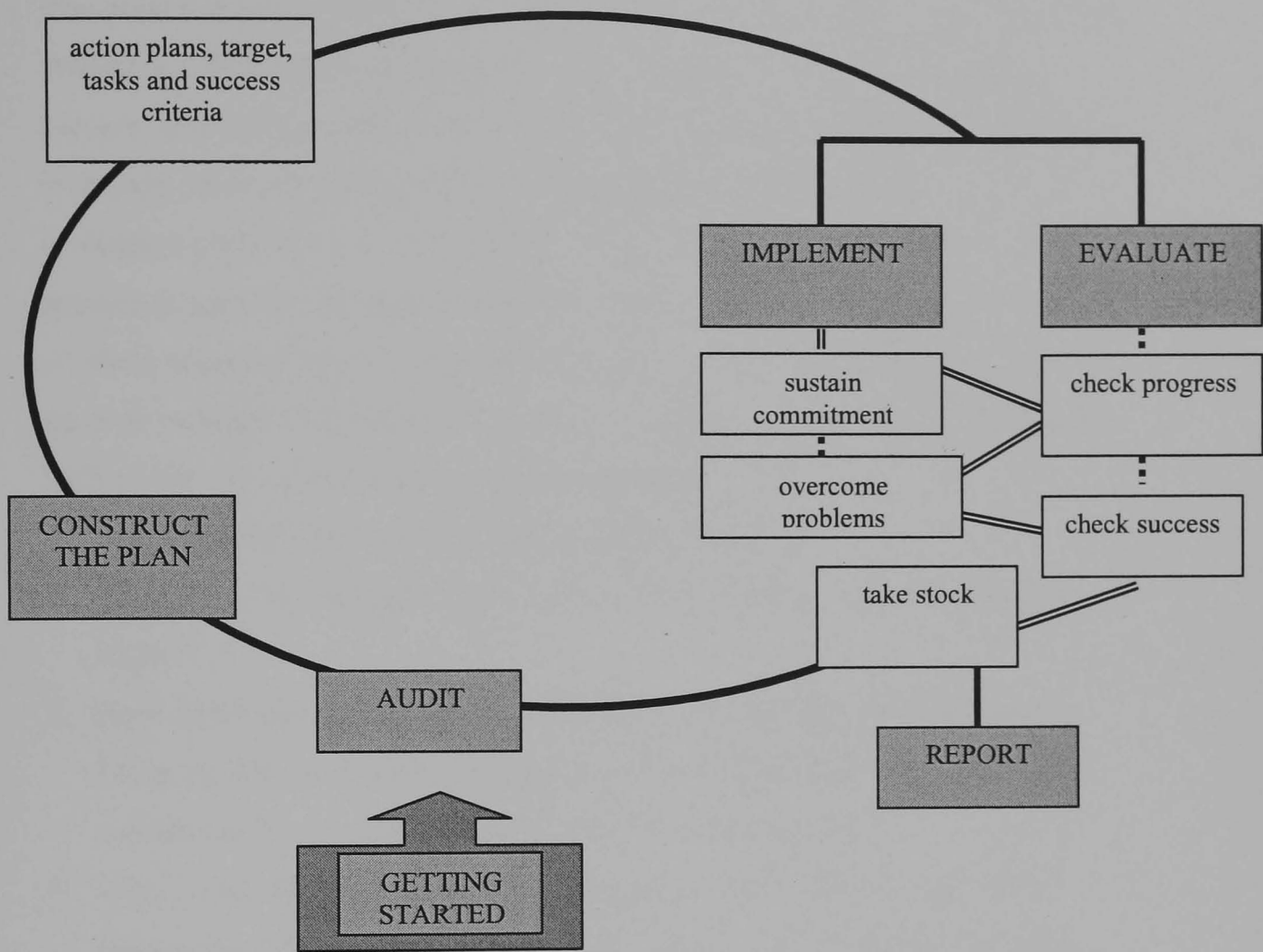
management cycle if schools are to learn their strengths and weaknesses and to find out what works and why it works. An evaluation may well support the suggestion of including strategies for addressing underachievement further down the school or even the construction and implementation of other strategies.

It is far easier to construct a plan than it is to implement it. Many of the existing guidelines for schools describe the implementation and evaluation as separate stages. It could be argued that this is sensible as it would be difficult to check whether targets have been met until after the implementation. There is a risk however, that the school may begin to ask basic questions about evaluation late in their planning and so run into three problems (DES,1989):

- Evaluating progress becomes difficult because preparatory groundwork has been neglected.
- The teachers find that they have too little time to undertake evaluation.
- Because it has been left too late evaluation cannot support implementation.

To help schools to avoid these problems the DES (1989) recommend that schools treat the processes of implementation and evaluation as interlaced, not as a period of implementation followed by a 'big bang' evaluation at the end (DES 1989,14). They go on to point out that if the two are linked then evaluation can help shape and guide the action plan rather than being a *post mortem* upon it. They also state that different priorities and targets will have different time-scales there being no single point in a school's calendar being exclusively concerned with evaluation. A diagram has been produced to show how the planning process could work (DES 1989,14).

Figure 2:2 Model of planning cycle (DES 1989,14)



As part of the cycle the implementation and evaluation stages run side by side. The implementation has two parts namely 'sustain commitment' and 'overcome problems'. The evaluation has three parts 'checking progress', 'checking success' and 'taking stock'. Each process is not an isolated part being connected with each other and linking both the implementation processes and the evaluation processes, each one feeding off and building on the other. This appears to me to be an approach that the senior management team need to consider adopting rather than a rushed 'end it all' bolt on evaluation that does not help with the further improvement of initiatives. From this advice from the DES (1989,17) six checkpoints can be suggested:

1. How do senior staff actively support implementation?
2. Have progress checks been carried out for each target, how often and by whom?
3. How do the results of the progress checks help to overcome problems?
When should the results of the progress tests be inputted? Should they be considered by senior management or by a working party?
4. Who should be responsible for the success checks? Who is going to be responsible for collating the progress checks? Is there enough time for discussion and analysis of the extent of the success? What are the implications for future work? What are the implications for all those not involved and for the school as a whole?
5. Do the reporting procedures include all those involved and interested? How is the report presented? Is it as a *fait accompli* or is it open to a forum for discussion? Are the pupils involved and if so how, and are their opinions sought and then taken into account? This appears to be a perfect opportunity to consider their opinions. Are the parents also to be included in the process? Again, how will this be done and who will be involved?

Pupils are a good source of perceptive comments about their school and what factors could make it better and perhaps their views need to be solicited more frequently and taken more seriously and used to inform management decisions.

An investigation is required to see if the issues discussed above are happening and to check if the structure is present and is being used effectively at St James'. Some sort of research enquiry needs to be started looking into what exactly needs doing and what can realistically be achieved. It is all very well getting carried away with ideas on paper but someone has to sit down and audit what is going on and then decide what can be done.

Chapter 3. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH SETTING

Methodology

The initial main aim of the study was to evaluate an initiative introduced by the senior management team that had been running for five years in order to make recommendations for improvements.

The main aim of the research therefore can be defined as the evaluation of current practice in raising pupil examination achievement at the school by:

- evaluating senior management practice.
- eliciting pupils' perceptions in order to formulate recommendations for further raising of pupil examination achievement.
- the evaluation of the effectiveness of the management analysis tools for predicting pupils' grades.
- investigating the effectiveness of mentoring in the school.
- assessing if this was the most effective way to raise achievement of pupils.

I wanted to move this initiative on, but to do this I had to see if the initiative was in fact doing what it had set out to do that is, raise the exam performance of the targeted pupils and if so by how much? The above aims therefore were operationalised to produce the research questions found on pages 15-16 of this thesis.

It is essential therefore, from time to time to take deliberate steps back from hands on activity in order to make some assessment or evaluation of progress, at present this may not have taken place effectively so there may be limited evidence of the success of the initiative. An evaluation that also included the perceptions of the pupils' to whom the initiative was happening, seemed an excellent way forward in determining exactly where the initiative was and in what way it needed to move forward and how that could be achieved.

Evaluation

In the previous chapter I discussed the importance of evaluation in the management cycle, in this next section I will explore what I feel evaluation is and how it impinges on the initiative. At its simplest level, evaluation means placing a value on things. Aspinwall et al (1992:2) propose a more exhaustive definition:

“Evaluation is part of the decision-making process. It involves making judgements about the worth of any activity through systematically and openly collecting and analysing information about it and relating this to explicit objectives, criteria and values.”

The research questions being asked:

- how successful is the initiative? and
- in what ways can it be improved?

required an evaluation to be undertaken, as it required judgements about the current initiative being made and judgements then being made about any possible future action. The interest was brought about by my involvement in the initiative and wanting, in the first instance, to see how it worked so to better understand how it could be utilised most effectively. Secondly, to elicit the views of the consumers (the pupils) on whom it was being used. To this end it was decided that an evaluation which involved thorough and systematic data collection, the analysis of which could then be used to make judgements about the effectiveness of the initiative was the most appropriate approach. The monitoring of results over the period of study helped to judge whether what was happening was what was intended to happen, that is an improvement in the GCSE examination grades of the identified underachieving pupils. The evaluation component of the study could then be used to help identify if the initiative was worthwhile for the school and its pupils, in terms of time spent and improvement of the examination results.

To identify the most effective next steps to be taken by the school formative evaluation about the strengths, weaknesses, advantages and disadvantages of a particular initiative or development needed to occur.

Hargreaves *et al* (1989) in their advice to governors, head teachers and teachers when planning for school development identify four key stages in the school development planning cycle, Audit, Plan construction, Implementation and Evaluation. For example: Where are we now? Where do we want to go? How do we get there? How shall we know whether we have got there?

For this particular initiative I was concerned that only the first three of these four stages had taken place. The senior management team knew where the school was with respect to examination performance, they knew in which direction they wanted to go and had decided on a strategy that had been implemented. But if there had been no evaluation did they know if they had got to where they wanted to be and did they know how successful they had been. If they did know, what empirical evidence did they have to base it on?

This then leads us into the issue of management of this initiative. Aspinwall *et al* (1992:14) underlying assumption is that evaluative activities will only be effective if they embody principles both of good evaluation practice and of good management practice.

They make three points which link them (1992:48):

- Evaluation needs to be seen as an integral part of the management process.
- Evaluative activities can be seen as three kinds, Monitoring, Review and Further inquiry.
- The evaluation process must be thought through and managed as a whole.

In other words evaluation is a part of management just as management is a part of evaluation, one should not exist without the other if good practice is to emerge.

The three key attributes which define what evaluation should be therefore are:

- Evaluation involves making judgements.
- Evaluation is, at best, open and explicit.
- Evaluation contributes to decision-making.

An issue that arose with the use of an evaluation was that of making value judgements. Two strands emerged:

- not being on the senior management team did I have the right and was I qualified to make these judgements?
- were the methods that I chose to use to inform the judgements I made acceptable and would they provide valid evidence?

Reliability and validity

With evaluation involving making judgements this section now discusses the issues of reliability and validity that impact on all studies. How far then could my observations be replicated and was I investigating what I wanted to investigate?

Reliability is consistency and replicability over time, instruments and groups of respondents. So the objective with reliability was to ensure that another investigator using the same methods would be able to arrive at the same findings and conclusions. The goal of reliability therefore, is to minimise the errors and biases in a study. Therefore one of the ways to increase reliability was to ensure that the procedures followed were fully documented both by hand in the form of a diary of events and on the computer as a list of events.

The issues of validity and reliability have been discussed by Yin (1994). Validity can be regarded as taking on three dimensions:

The first, Construct Validity which is establishing the correct operational measures. To meet the test of construct validity two steps have to be covered:

- selecting the specific types of changes that are to be studied
- demonstrating that the selected measures of these changes do reflect the specific types of change that have been selected.

To increase the construct validity there are two tactics that I used:

- using multiple sources of evidence
- establishing a chain of evidence

The second, Internal Validity which is correctly determining that there is in fact a causal relationship, together with the issue of making correct inferences. In other words does event X lead to event Y or is there some third factor Z which may have caused Y? To address this type of validity different methods were used in the collection of data to ascertain if the evidence was convergent, and rival explanations and possibilities were considered and discussed.

The third, External Validity, has the problem of knowing whether the study's findings are generalisable beyond the immediate case study. One of the main criticisms of single case studies within the positivist paradigm is that they offer a poor basis for generalising. This is making the assumptions that instrumentation, data and findings should be controllable, predictable, consistent and replicable. Researchers in the qualitative paradigm would argue that this degree of control and manipulation distorts the natural occurrence of the phenomena, and that the uniqueness and idiosyncrasies of situations means that the study cannot be replicated, and is a strength and not a weakness. Cohen and Manion (2000:120) argue that in qualitative methodologies reliability includes fidelity to real life, context and situation specificity, authenticity comprehensiveness, detail, honesty, depth of response and meaningfulness to the respondents. It was for these reasons then that I decided to follow a mixed methods approach.

The sampling techniques are also crucial for validity. Different types of sampling were chosen, to increase the validity. The following types of sampling used were (Aspinwall et al 1992: 171) Systematic sampling where every seventh name from an alphabetical list was taken in the distribution of the school life questionnaire. Stratified sampling, which involved sub dividing the original list into categories according to gender or age as was used in the school life questionnaire when different groups were identified by year group and gender. Deliberate or purposive sampling, where it is decided that a particular group or individual is appropriate for your purpose, in the case of this research the identified underachieving pupils.

Validity in evaluation therefore, relates more to the careful match of the quality of information to the claims that are being made rather than to the quantity of information collected.

As I am involved in the initiative and want it to succeed because I believe in the value of pupil perceptions of their education, I am an interested researcher. Interested because of my involvement with the issues I am investigating and also because I see the research as enlightening my own experience and informing my own future development of management techniques. As I have an interest in improving what is going on, and will have to report my findings in the evaluation stage to the LEA, who are providing some financial assistance and also to the senior management team, I am also an internal consultant. I feel that because of what I am trying to achieve, helping the successful implementation of the initiative, I will also be a change agent. As I will be making judgements I consider this project to be an evaluation. However, I will be gathering data from a relatively large population to get a background feel of perceptions, so it will also be a survey.

There are good points and bad points for being a part of the organisation. Firstly it is good for gaining access as I am working in the school and also know the respondents, but being a part of the culture means that it is far more difficult to stand back and critically evaluate what is going on (Lomax, 1994).

Secondly with my position and relationship with the pupils (their Head of Year), my respondents (the pupils) are going to be aware that the data they provide to me may potentially harm them (Berger and Patchner, 1994). Thus confidentiality may become a real problem as anything sensitive that was asked not to be included may affect the eventual evaluation and recommendations of the data, and pupils may have felt that they were unable to answer the questions honestly due to any possible 'comebacks'. The data therefore may have become bland, respondents not wanting to 'rock the boat' perhaps leading to non- controversial recommendations if any at all. This problem was addressed in two ways:

- by ensuring confidentiality to all respondents
- by looking at different types of data collection techniques and different sample groups, which were then used to triangulate against each other and so increased the validity and reliability of the findings and recommendations (Bird 1995:51).

Research or evaluation?

Another issue that I want to discuss is that of research and evaluation and their differences and similarities in the research debate and how each impact on the validity of the research.

What was driving my interest in the area I had chosen? I was very interested in identifying particular strategies in use that would enable underachievers to realise their full potential, and the management of these strategies. However, the main strategy in place in the school that I had access to evaluate could be argued to be politically driven, that is the identification and targeting of underachievers within a very narrow band in the spectrum of underachievers. This narrow band was chosen by senior management in order to target the improvement of the schools performance in the league performance tables, a political motive. So was the study I wished to undertake 'pure research' or was it 'evaluative research' driven by the current political climate?

This is an important question to resolve as both share several of the same methodological characteristics, that is they both pose questions and hypotheses, select samples, manipulate and measure variables, compute statistics and data, and finally they both state conclusions.

However, it has been argued that there are important differences between 'evaluative research' and 'pure research'. The main one being that evaluative research is politically driven following a set agenda structured to a time limit whereas pure research is not politically driven with no externally set agenda (Smith and Glass 1987 and Norris 1990). By identifying to which type the study belonged the correct methods could be pursued to produce valid evidence. The main difference between 'evaluative research' and 'pure research' are the intents and purposes of the investigation (Smith and Glass 1987 and Norris 1990). My intention was to contribute to the theory, my motivation to satisfy my curiosity and further my knowledge but also to contribute to the solution of the problem, in particular to inform future decisions about the initiative and its management. The answer is not clear as there is considerable overlap between 'evaluative research' and 'pure research'. There are conceptual differences between them, though in practice they argue, there is considerable blurring at the edges of these differences. Due to this and my conception of the project being both evaluative and research I decided to mix methods and use both a quantitative approach and qualitative approach.

The project can be described as a case study in this case St. James' school, providing an example of real people in real situations allowing observation of effects in real contexts.

To judge how successful the initiative had been two methodological approaches were employed, a scientific approach with the use of statistical analysis of data and comparison of exam results and predictive tools. However, this hard scientific approach did not take into account what was happening at the human level, it did not explain why people have different perceptions. It was therefore

inefficient at understanding the processes involved which in turn was unhelpful in generating theory or predicting outcomes. A more interpretive and subjective approach would enable people to explain their different perspectives through their different experiences, a position not covered by the positivist paradigm.

Alternatives to this approach reject the beliefs that human behaviour is governed by general universal laws and characterised by underlying regularities. It is believed by those approaches that the social world can only be understood from the standpoint of the individuals who are part of the ongoing action being investigated. The technical term for collecting data in a variety of ways and from more than one sample is called triangulation. Triangulation is the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour. As Aspinwall et al (1992:181) point out, if you can find three different ways of looking at an issue and come up with coherent findings you can be fairly sure that these will provide valid evidence on which to proceed. The different data collection techniques were from different sources both being quantitative and qualitative were constructed with a view to improving the validity of the findings. So mixing of methods and triangulation, rather than relying on one method which may bias or distort the picture of a particular piece of reality, and to be sure that the data are not artefacts of the methods of data collection, will help to improve the validity.

To identify the most effective next steps to be taken an evaluation about the strengths, weaknesses, advantages and disadvantages of this particular initiative or development needs to occur.

The Research Context

This next section describes the school where the research takes place and discusses management structures within the school.

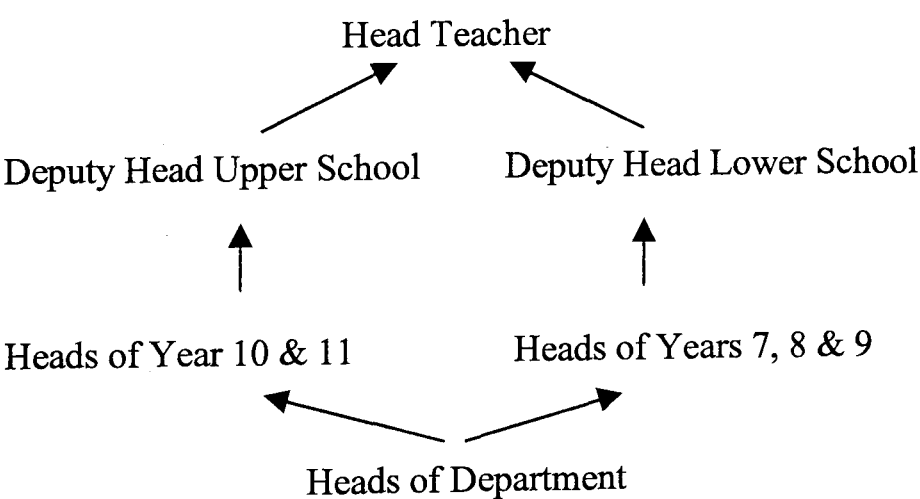
The school where the research took place, known as St. James' for the purpose of this research to conceal its identity, is an 11-16 Voluntary Aided Catholic school, and has a five-form entry of around 156 pupils per year group drawing on an extensive catchment area. St James' is the only Catholic Secondary School in the North of the county and currently caters for pupils of all abilities, both boys and girls between the ages of 11-16. At the time of the research there were 780 pupils on roll with the schools intake being 156 pupils. There are 44 teachers at the school. The school is consistently oversubscribed each year with over 200 first place preferences for the 156 places and as such this reflects the school's high standing in the local community. The school has a large catchment area with over 60% of pupils being bused to school. In general, the areas where pupils live have above average levels of disadvantage (OFSTED Nov 2000). The proportion of pupils from ethnic minority families is below average, the proportion for whom English is an additional language is a little higher than nationally being made up of Italian and Spanish Catholics. The average percentage of pupils over the last 4 years gaining 5 or more GCSE grades A*-C is 57% which is significantly above local, county and national averages in this category. In the summer of 2002, 62% of pupils achieved 5 or more A*-C which represents the school's highest figure ever in this category. In the new value-added tables, St James' pupils achieved the second highest score in the county at Key Stage 4 and the seventh highest at Key Stage 3. Also, 97% of all school leavers in recent years have achieved 6 or more GCSE grades A*-G another criteria by which schools are compared.

According to the OFSTED team (November 2000), St James' is a very good school with a strong sense of community and individual worth. Standards are above average and pupils make considerably better progress than would be expected given their prior achievement. They benefit from very good teaching and from the strength of relationships within the school community. Leadership and management are very strong and the school provides good value for money.

OFSTED summarise their findings of the leadership and management of the school as very good. The school is managed with thoroughness to bring about targeted improvements. Strong leadership is identified as being given by the Headteacher and senior staff with the quality of department management developing well. The governors fulfil their responsibilities very well being a strong team taking up their role as critical friend very well. The school’s evaluation of its performance is judged as good, systems for review and evaluation, for example through department review, are being set in place, there being some effective lesson monitoring although this is not yet happening across the school. The strategic use of resources was concluded as very good there being effective targets both for developing resources and for using them both to raise standards and to improve the quality of provision to support this.

Each year group has a Head of Year, five tutors plus a reserve tutor. The school is divided into an upper school (Years 10 and 11 for Key Stage 4) and a lower school (Years 7, 8 and 9 for Key Stage 3). The school has two Deputy Headteachers one responsible for each school area, the Headteacher being ultimately responsible.

Figure 3:1 The Management Structure of St James’



As well as Heads of Year, Heads of Department are also involved in middle management. The school is my place of work, at the time of the study I was Head of Year 11, and so access to and collection of data and its follow up was easier than a school in which I would have been unfamiliar. In the fourteen

years that I have worked here, St. James' has always been oversubscribed, the number of appeals to gain a place at the school increasing yearly, to over 30 in the year 2000. This shows that St. James' is a popular choice of school for parents. St. James' is also very successful in terms of examination performance, coming second in the area, excluding private schools for the same year.

Decisions are made by the senior management team and passed down to heads of year and heads of department for implementation. These two groups meet independently with the senior management team once every four weeks. An agenda is produced by the senior management team and displayed on the staff notice board a few days before the meeting. A member of the senior management team is assigned to each department and should attend the department meetings, however both deputies are members of the Maths department and so attend that meeting. Head of Department meetings discuss agenda items the minutes used in department meetings which take place the following Monday. A similar routine also occurs for HOY meetings. HOYs also meet once a week with their link Deputy to discuss pupil issues that have arisen.

There is no forum where HOY can meet with each other or with the HOD for the sharing of good practice, it is almost as if each department and tutor group is working in isolation. Departments could be grouped together to track and monitor the progress of pupils. Within departments there appears to be a certain amount of sharing of good practice, discussion of pupil progress, strategies for improvement, current issues and the improvement of pupil grades but little discussion outside of the department.

The senior management team identified underachieving pupils using data supplied by the staff. This information was based on pupils' predicted grades calculated from YELLIS results (an externally set test taken by pupils in Year 10 that claims to be able to predict pupils' potential GCSE grades in all

subjects), SATS results from the end of Key Stage 3, performance in the Year 10 periodic science GCSE examination and the mock examinations, taken in the first term of Year 11. The staff also provided potential grades of pupils, grades that the staff felt the pupils were capable of achieving.

This meant that there were four sources of information available to the senior management team when identifying underachieving pupils:

- Yellis grades which give a guide to what pupils could expect to get in the GCSE.
- Predicted grades based upon their Year 10 GCSE periodic examination (worth 25% of their final GCSE grade) and their mock examination results.
- Potential grades, were what the teachers felt the pupils were capable of achieving based on their knowledge of the pupil from the pupils' attitudes to homework, coursework, deadlines, classroom behaviour and any other relevant information.
- Coursework marks, which gave an indication of pupil progress and attitude to work based upon meeting deadlines.

From this information by comparing all the data the senior management team identified those pupils that appeared to be underachieving especially the underachieving pupils on the D/C boundary. Once identified, the pupils were interviewed by a senior teacher, initially to share the information and to set targets. An interview was then arranged with the pupil and their parents to again share the information and to discuss the targets. More interviews were arranged depending on the pupil's needs, for instance timetables being produced for late coursework and strategies introduced and discussed for appropriate revision techniques. This strategy has now been evolving over the last five years but with no apparent overall coordination.

My role in the school was that of Head of Year of the Year 11 group under study. Being their Head of Year meant that I had a very high profile with them, taking weekly assemblies, being responsible for the discipline of the Year

Group, overseeing attendance, organising year activities and trips. Throughout the five years the pupils were at St. James' I had developed a supportive critical approach towards the pupils. This was to show pupils that they could count on my support provided they were honest with me. This approach gained their trust, which was especially important when soliciting their perceptions and opinions.

Instruments Used in Data Collection

Due to the sudden tragic death of my 18 year old son James, and an impending OFSTED inspection the preferred study instruments had to be changed. The semi-structured interviews that were planned did not take place, instead a questionnaire (appendix 2) was produced which focused on pupil perceptions of school life. The questionnaire was produced as I was unable to be in school for a period of three weeks. The interviews would have required my presence in school with pupils who were going to be distressed when talking to me, something I felt I could not face at that time, so using the questionnaire was a suitable alternative. It must also be pointed out that at this stage of the study I was all for giving up, but with the support of my family and my tutor supervisor I found a route through. Data was also collected from ten targeted Year 11 pupils through ten minute structured interviews (appendix 3). Also, data was obtained from one twenty minute unstructured interview and one lesson observation of an identified underachieving disaffected Year 11 male pupil (appendix 4). The ten structured interviews formed a part of the school's policy of the initiative for the identification of underachieving Year 11 pupils, of which 30 were initially identified. The pupils were approached individually and in private, the strategy being explained and their co-operation and views were sought. The unstructured interview came about from a disturbance in a lesson that I was asked to deal with. The Year 11 male pupil was one of the ten pupils identified as underachieving who was causing disruption in many areas of the school. At the time he appeared quite willing to talk especially when he realised he was not going to be shouted at. The lesson observation is of the

same pupil following on from findings of the interview and conflicting claims about the pupil's classroom behaviour from the pupil and his teachers.

The data collected for the evaluation was as follows:

- Questionnaire of school life.
- Structured interviews with targeted pupils for pre initiative perceptions.
- Questionnaire for targeted pupils for post initiative perceptions.
- Lesson observation of the disruptive underachieving male pupil.
- Unstructured interview of the disruptive underachieving male pupil.
- Comparison of predictive analytical tools used by the senior management team.

Questionnaire of school life.

A questionnaire was used to provide an overview of pupils' perceptions and was felt to be particularly useful at the beginning of the process of evaluation in order to reveal the broad span of opinion before deciding which aspects to consider in more depth. This was done because I felt that the pupils could let me know a lot about their schooling. I also wanted to use questionnaires as I felt they enable everyone to feel that their opinion has been sought and that they have contributed to the debate. It would also enable me to make comparisons between groups and individuals which is important because perceptions of different age pupils as well as from different genders were also sought. This could then be used to determine if underachievement could be identified to a particular time in a pupil's career, if it occurred earlier than suspected by the senior management team and if underachievement was gender specific.

The questionnaire was distributed to thirty pupils in the following way to cover a range of age and gender groups:

- ten to Year 11, five boys and five girls across the five forms
- ten to Year 9, five boys and five girls across the five forms

- ten to Year 6, five boys and five girls across two forms from one of the local feeder schools

The idea of targeting these year groups was to:

- See if perceptions change as pupils progress through the school
- Compare the perceptions between boys and girls of school life
- Compare perceptions between year groups
- Identify where underachievement and or disillusionment may occur in pupils' school careers
- See if underachievement manifested itself before year 11 which was the year group that was targeted for this initiative.

Interviewing was not felt to be a practical method at this stage, due to the size of the sample and for the reasons already given, even though perceptions can be teased out and pursued more thoroughly by that technique.

In the questionnaire I decided not to give the pupils a range of responses. This was to reduce response bias (Youngman, 1994), that is the strong tendency of respondents to agree, and so help to increase validity. This enabled me to generate quantitative data in a fast and economical way that was easy to analyse and display and on which considerable relevance is placed by senior managers when making policy decisions (Easterby-Smith *et al* 1994). However this paradigm does have weaknesses, it does not explain why people have different perceptions. It is therefore inefficient at understanding the processes involved which in turn is unhelpful in generating theory or predicting outcomes. As I was interested in people's perceptions I wanted to include some qualitative questioning in the questionnaire so the interviews would enable pupils to explain their different perspectives through their different experiences, a position not covered by the positivist paradigm.

Once the questionnaire was designed it was piloted (Youngman 1994) on two Year 10 pupils and a critical friend, in order to determine if the theme for the

questionnaire was explicit, the questions were all relevant and understandable and that the questionnaire was not too long which may have generated frustration and then poor response rates. The questionnaires were returned and slight changes were made to the wording in one of the questions to avoid ambiguity.

When finally drafted the questionnaire was handed to form tutors with a letter of explanation and a verbal explanation. I have found that written instructions are always open to different interpretations and verbal instructions help to reduce misunderstanding and also allowed me the satisfaction of knowing my instructions were understood and that each pupil would receive the same instructions. Each tutor was asked to give the questionnaire to one boy and one girl from their tutor group whose names were found in the middle of the register. Pupils were reminded to return the questionnaires (Woods, 1994) through their logbooks, some tutors distributed and collected the questionnaires on the same day, resulting in the 100% return rate.

The quantitative data was determined by simply calculating the frequency distribution (Hardman, 1994) to give a quick visual summary of responses the results of which are shown in the next chapter. Each question was written onto a separate piece of paper. The responses for each question were then written on each appropriate piece of paper. As responses were often repeated a simple tally chart was constructed and totals counted to give a general overview of pupils' perceptions. Some responses were grouped together where the meaning of the answers were the same although written differently to make analysis easier.

Problems associated with questionnaires is that people may not remember (Godsmark, 1994) and this was why in this study, semi-structured interviews were hoped to be used as a vehicle to prompt and to help promote thought. Also, to increase the reliability of the findings, especially as interviews provide an excellent opportunity to analyse, probe and evaluate respondents' perceptions in a way that was just not accessible by the questionnaire. This

would therefore be a more appropriate way of collecting data on pupils perceptions about underachievement and the strategies employed by the school to help them. Sadly the semi-structured interviews were not able to be pursued for reasons already given.

As already stated the survey of school life resulted in a 100% return rate of the questionnaires. The only problem was with the last question on the questionnaire that was misunderstood by some of the Year 6 pupils. Instead of putting subjects in preference order as required by the question, two of the ten pupils chose their favourite and least favourite. This was felt to be a minor problem affecting the results only slightly, as it was the favourite and least favourite that were important to the question.

Also, the analysis was problematic as just because a response was not present on the questionnaire did not mean it was not a factor, again something that could have been probed by the semi- structured interviews. Responses were analysed by doing frequency counts in a tally table on the more closed responses. Where the responses were more open allowing more interpretation, these were put into groups of similar categories and then counted giving an overall impression to the question.

Structured interviews with pupils for pre initiative perceptions.

The structured interviews took place in the English Department office as this was felt by me to be more neutral ground than my office. The idea was to find out the pupils' perceptions on how they were doing and to explain the underachievement strategy to them. This was to elicit their perceptions upon their schooling before the intervention and so give a comparison to their views post initiative in order to form conclusions about the effectiveness of the initiative in their eyes. Interviews were therefore used in order to provide rich data and hopefully give considerable insight into their perceptions and attitudes. Any misconceptions or misunderstandings about what was being asked were

recognised and dealt with at the time of the interview, which is not the case with questionnaires. It can also be rewarding to be interviewed and also interview. The interviewee would have an opportunity to express their opinions, clarify ideas and feel that these were valued and were making a valuable contribution to the improvement of the initiative. Thus the interview can prove a learning experience for both parties (Aspinwall *et al* 1992:176).

The reason for the interviews being structured was that the interviews needed to be done very quickly during morning registration, a time slot of only twenty minutes, so that the information could be used to compare with the mock results, in order that pupils could be placed with identified senior staff as quickly as possible. All information was written down immediately onto the interview schedule (appendix 4).

There are problems associated with interviews that I had to be aware of. Wragg (1994) points out that there is the possibility of interviewer bias where questioning can lead the respondent in a certain consciously or subconsciously desired direction. To address this issue there was an interview schedule so that all interviewees experienced the same questions in the same order. This can lead to straight jacket interviews where tightly structured interview schedules permit little latitude, also a problem that can be associated with questionnaires which is why interviews were also included in the research. Also, there is the issue of respondent bias where respondents give the interviewer an answer, which is more public relations for their own group than an accurate response, and finally the sample may also be biased. I was hoping that my relationship with these pupils and the explanation as to why the research was important would reduce this bias.

As well as these, other disadvantages have been identified (Aspinwall *et al* 1992:174). Interviews are time consuming at all stages, from planning, preparing, executing, analysis and interpretation. It is therefore difficult to deal with more than a small sample. This was a concern I had especially as there was no control group with which to compare. The reason for no control group

was down to an ethical decision. It was felt that all identified underachievers should be targeted and that if a pupil was identified and not targeted this would be unable to be justified. Added to this, the breadth and amount of data may make interpretation and analysis difficult. The interviewer's style and status may influence the response. This can prove problematic if several interviewers are involved or when teachers interview pupils. There is a danger of bias, both in the way that the interview is conducted and in the way that comments are recorded. The interview itself cannot be anonymous. If quotations are used in a report they may be identifiable, even if the speaker is not named, particularly within a group who know each other well.

All these points require careful consideration so that the data collected is valid and reliable.

Questionnaire to pupils for post initiative perceptions.

This data was collected post initiative in order to compare the two sets of pupil perceptions to establish if and what effect the initiative had on the pupils from their point of view, and also to see if it was an effective initiative.

This data collection required immediate attention due to an approaching deadline (see appendix 5) for the post GCSE underachieving pupils'. This was to canvass their perceptions about the initiative they had been a part of. An opportunity presented itself on 15 November 2001 when the majority of the past Year 11 pupils were present in school to collect their certificates at prize giving. As the pupils were invited to the ceremony by letter, it was not known for certain until the 14 November who would be attending the prize giving evening. For those pupils who do not attend, the questionnaire was sent out by post. Being their Head of Year I had access to their addresses. Also, in previous meetings all underachieving pupils were asked if they could be contacted in the future, and all had given their consent.

The questionnaire was given out on the evening of the prize giving, my role for the evening being to welcome pupils and sign them in, giving me an excellent opportunity to speak to them all and then hand out the questionnaire. The questionnaire had a covering explanatory letter, pupils being encouraged to complete and hand the questionnaire in at the end of the evening in an attempt to try and increase response rate and also to speed up the whole process of completion and return of the questionnaire. So far my use of questionnaires in this project had involved a captive audience where I had been able to approach students with personal reminders whilst they were still in school. In this case the audience were no longer captive so the whole process was harder taking longer and also resulting in lower response rates. I was also under no illusion about people's willingness to complete the questionnaire on the evening with all the distractions of seeing old friends and comparing notes on courses and jobs, so each questionnaire had a stamped addressed envelope for pupils to return the questionnaire in if they felt it more appropriate to complete them at home. Again, this was hoped to increase response rates. Finally, any pupil not attending or not returning the questionnaire would be phoned to remind them or was offered a telephone interview based on the questionnaire. Unfortunately body language is not available over the phone, but I felt that I had got to know all of these pupils well over the past five years and so hopefully this would not be a major problem. As it was no interviews took place over the phone as there was a sufficiently high response rate.

Once the questionnaires had been returned (I was looking to receive a minimum of sixteen out of the twenty-four) the data was compared doing a comparison of pre initiative perceptions and post initiative perceptions. I wanted to know if the pupils thought:

- the mentoring was done successfully by staff,
- could it have been done differently,
- how should it have been done,
- should it have started earlier, and
- did they feel it had any effect?

This would give indications (though based on a small number) of pupils' perceptions on the success of the initiative and also provide areas of success and failure within the initiative that could be acted upon for the present and subsequent Year 11 groups.

The questionnaire was divided into five sections. It was composed of short answer questions to elicit the pupils' perceptions of the initiative that they had been a part of. I especially wanted to get their post initiative perceptions as I felt that they were likely to be more honest now that they had left school and the spectre of the examinations was over. The problem now was one of access. Whereas before, when the pupils were in school, it was very easy to contact and speak to them, now that they had gone this was going to be more difficult. I had planned to hand out the questionnaires at prize giving when all past Year 11 students are invited back to school one evening, to receive their certificates. I also hoped that the pupils would be able to hand the completed questionnaires back to me the same evening. As it was, only three of the targeted underachieving pupils turned up for the evening and none of them had time to complete the questionnaire before they left. This now meant that each of the remaining twenty-one questionnaires required posting. To encourage a maximum return rate, I also included with the letter of explanation and questionnaire a stamped addressed envelope. This was to reduce the effort and cost to each of the pupils. I had a return rate of 17/24 (71%). I was a little disappointed with this being used to 100% return rates, but now I did not have that captive sample.

The five sections of the questionnaire were as follows:

- Perceptions about the project
- Perceptions about parental involvement
- Perceptions of their mentors
- Perceptions of themselves
- Destinations after their GCSE exams

Perceptions about the project

This was to see if they understood what the project was about and how they felt that the project helped them, if at all. I was also interested in their perceptions of the future use of the project for other year groups and, if it could be improved in anyway.

Perceptions about parental involvement

The involvement of parents was questioned to see if pupils felt that a home school partnership at this stage of their education was desirable and helpful and if so could this be extended to all pupils?

Perceptions of their mentors

Perceptions about mentors was important as there were four mentors in the project, and as far as I was aware no training was given. I certainly had no training and devised my own programme for the mentees. This section was devised to see if there was any similarity and consistency in approach and how much control of the process the mentees felt that they had had. This part of the questionnaire also allowed an insight into how much communication occurred between mentors and presented issues about the management of this particular initiative by the senior management team. The perceptions could then be used to improve the roles of the mentor and make the mentor mentee relationship more effective.

Perceptions of themselves

This section was used to explore the pupils perceptions of themselves, how they felt they had done and if, in fact, they felt they could have done better.

Destinations after GCSE exams

The final question was to see where the pupils ended up post 16. I felt that the destinations were important, as these were a rough indicator of the success of the initiative. The problem with this is that there was no destination data available on the previous years underachievers with which to compare and so judge its success .

The questionnaire was analysed by writing each question onto a grid and recording the number of responses to the question. For example, writing out answers and marking off similar responses, also recording the number of yes/no responses. The similar responses were totaled and converted to a percentage and then compared.

Designing questionnaires is difficult but crucial, particularly in a postal survey where it is not possible for respondents to check what is meant by a particular question. Also, it must be remembered that you will only be given the answers you ask for. Important issues may be missed or obscured, even if you add 'Is there anything else you would like to say?' as the final question (Aspinwall *et al* 1992:174). Analysis of the data can also be difficult and time consuming, particularly if the questionnaire is lengthy or where open-ended questions are used. As already mentioned the choice of a response scale needs to be carefully chosen for example strongly agree...strongly disagree may lead to an averaging of responses, that is respondents are more likely to be less controversial and pick the middle ground. The broader the scale, the more likely this is. Because questionnaires are impersonal, they may lack information that set responses into context. Recipients may feel that questionnaires are an imposition, a bore or difficult to fill in, and this may affect the response rate.

Unstructured interview of disruptive underachieving male pupil.

The unstructured interview took place after the pupil in question was removed from a lesson. It was rather an opportunity grabbed than a planned activity, and took the course of a conversation about the pupil's behaviour in lessons, why he behaved that way, what he wanted from school and what he thought of school. This then gave me an insight first hand into the perceptions of an underachieving male pupil and an opportunity to compare various theoretical statements about male underachieving disruptive pupils with the real thing. No notes were taken because of the delicacy of the situation so I had to rely on my recollections. I wrote these up straight after the meeting to reduce the effect of forgetting what was said. I also asked the pupil to check what I had written at a subsequent meeting to reduce any unintentional bias on my part and to add anything that I had missed out.

Lesson observation of disruptive underachieving male pupil.

Once interviewed I wanted to assess if what was being said to me translated in the classroom situation. Again this was to provide an insight into what motivates and demotivates pupils and what conclusions can be drawn.

The lesson observation was undertaken as a non-participant data collection technique (Cohen and Manion:1994). It is impossible to observe everything all of the time. Open observation can be confusing and closed, checklist observation may limit what is seen. These issues were dealt with in the following ways. Due to the conflicting perceptions of teacher and pupil all I was interested in was (appendix 4);

- What the task in the lesson was?
- Was the pupil on task?
- If not on task what was the pupil doing?

These observations were made to see just how much time the pupil spent on task but more importantly how much time was spent off task and so how much of the lesson was being missed by the pupil and so impacting on his learning.

To do this I sat at the back of the room but in full view of the pupil. I made sure that I was present in the room before any of the pupils entered and I had negotiated access to the lesson after I had received a complaint from the teacher about the pupil. I only looked at the pupil after every minute in order to fill in the observation schedule. This allowed me to record observations as they occurred but I had to make sure that I was clear on what was being recorded due to the short time that I had allowed myself. I also had to be accurate in my observations as this was a one off and I would be unable to check my observations. I was very aware that my presence in the classroom would affect the behaviour of the pupils and the pupil under observation. I made it very clear that I was not to be approached by avoiding all eye contact, saying nothing and not taking part in any aspect of the lesson.

The reasons for the observation were as follows. Firstly, the member of staff had approached me, as I was the pupil's Head of Year, due to difficulties arising from the pupil in her lessons. And secondly, observation can provide insight into events as they happen and can sometimes challenge our existing perceptions and assumptions allowing a valuable insight into the behaviour and motivation of an underachieving male pupil. However it must also be remembered that observation only provides a snapshot of an event and so it is often hard to establish just how typical this is.

Comparison, analysis and evaluation of predictive analytical tools used by senior management team.

The tools used by the senior management to identify underachieving pupils were examined to see how effective they were at identifying underachieving pupils. It must be remembered that these tools were the only way that pupils

were identified. This then provides an insight into the effectiveness for each cohort and a measure of how successful the initiative had been.

The analysis of collected data falls into two main sections. The first, being the perceptions of the Year 11 group who have left (cohort 01). The second is the analysis of the predictive techniques compared to the actual results for underachieving pupils in cohorts 98, 00, and 01. The results for cohort 99 were obtained but the list of identified underachieving pupils could not be found. This was disappointing when all the results were present.

Over the past four years at St. James', pupils have been identified as underachievers using various analytical tools by the senior management. These tools are as follows:

- YELLIS
- Potential grade analytical tool
- Predicted grade analytical tool

The following areas were looked at for the identification of underachieving pupils:

- A comparison of the number of grades predicted for each analytical tool.
The number of grades predicted for each analytical tool were counted, these were then compared with the number of grades actually achieved by the pupils. This then identified which analytical tool was the most accurate in predicting the total number of grades achieved.
- A comparison of individual subject grades for each analytical tool against the actual subject grades achieved. In this instance each predicted subject grade for each tool was compared with the actual subject grade achieved and was marked down as either achieved, overachieved or underachieved. This then gives an indication, grade for grade which is the most accurate analytical tool used by the school.
- A comparison of the predicted 5 or more C grades and above for each tool.
For this analysis each pupil's number of predicted grade C's and above was

identified for each tool. Then the total number of Predicted and achieved 5 grade C's and above was recorded and compared for each analytical tool. 5 grade C's and above was used as this is the benchmark used by government to assess the success of the school.

- The number of grade C's and above predicted by each tool, was then compared against the actual achieved again to assess the accuracy of each analytical tool.
- Finally, a comparison of each year group's grades were assessed to see if there was an increase in grades to assess if this may have been due to the initiative.

The examination results gathered for each cohort of Year 11 underachieving pupils therefore included-

- Predicted grades based on Year 10 exam results.
- YELLIS grades based on Year 10 tests that predict pupils' potential grades in all subjects.
- Potential grades provided by teachers identifying what pupils could potentially expect to get based on past performance, coursework, class work and the professional judgement of the members of staff.
- GCSE results.

Predicted, YELLIS and Potential grades were all recorded on a spreadsheet for senior management use in identifying underachieving pupils. The GCSE grades were recorded onto a second separate spreadsheet. After careful manipulation both sheets were merged. See appendix 6 for a detailed description of the data manipulation and subsequent construction of the master spreadsheet for its analysis.

Once the spreadsheet of grades was produced a graph could then be drawn. A normal line will go through points 0:0 to points 7:7. This shows that the predicted grades match the actual grades. Points falling below this line can be considered as pupils who are underachieving, points falling along the line could

be considered as pupils who are achieving their potential, and points above the line could be considered as pupils who have over achieved their potential.

If the analysis was successful, then a similar analysis could be done on YELLIS grades against Actual grades and Potential grades against Actual grades and all results compared. YELLIS grades against actual grades to note the effectiveness of YELLIS as a predictive tool, Potential grades against Actual grades to analyse the effectiveness of staff predictions also as a predictive tool. This was predicted to take a further three hours of work. So I was looking to spend around five hours work on each year group.

A similar analysis could then be undertaken on the previous year groups, to monitor the apparent effectiveness of the strategy as time had passed. Data had been collected over the past three years, this meant a total of twenty hours work on data manipulation and analysis and then a comparative analysis between the form year groups perhaps another 2-4 hrs. I therefore estimated a total of twenty-four hours working on this area of data analysis.

The analysis of the GCSE results should give an indication of the success of the Year 11 initiative as it has progressed over the last three to four years. As pointed out earlier, by plotting a normal line that corresponds with predicted and actual grades, any pupils grades falling below this line will have underachieved, any pupils on the line will have achieved their potential and any above the line will have over achieved. The numbers of grades in each of these three groups can then be plotted on another graph, against the year to show the trend in underachievers, achievers and overachievers over the past three to four years. If the numbers of underachievers goes down over the subsequent years then this is an indication that the Year 11 initiative is working. I was hoping that the more formal arrangement for the last year's Year 11 would show the lowest number of underachievers, as more time and effort was placed into this particular years initiative which will hopefully have been rewarded with more of the underachievers reaching their potential. If this is not the case and there has been little or no improvement then the senior management have to make the

decision, is the initiative worth the time and effort, if not what if anything will take its place and how will this impinge on the new Year 7 initiative that the school is now committed to in time, effort, money and pupil and staff expectations?

When I came to do the plots after creating the new spreadsheets I realised that this visual representation of the results only served to confuse the issue when comparing the different cohorts and so a regression analysis and graphs have not been included after all. This was because when each grade for the analytical tool was plotted against the actual grade achieved because there were so many similar points on the graph it was impossible to show graphically any meaningful relationship. This was why each grade was looked at and a grid constructed for overachieved, underachieved and achieved. I also felt that placing a summary of the analysis in tables a clearer and more informative way to do the analysis. It did mean that for all the time spent on manipulation of the results, visually I did not have much to show for it.

To summarise, when I first thought about this research I wanted to evaluate what we were actually providing for the identified underachieving pupils and just how effective it was for them. I had a number of possible routes that were open to explore for example collecting data from the staff mentors and interviewing the senior management team to elicit their views on the management of the initiative. However, from my reading it appeared that very little research had been done on pupils' perceptions of their learning experience. It seemed more fruitful therefore to explore how pupils perceived the impact of this initiative on their examination success and could the initiative be made more effective given their feedback? Similarly, how good were the analytical tools for identifying underachievers and could they be improved upon?

If I were to do this again my design may be different, and had I not had to alter my plans, there would have been another set of semi-structured interviews providing more perceptions. This mix as discussed although a bit eclectic did in fact yield a rich data source for a reasonable evaluation that has informed

senior management of the present situation of the initiative and has provided recommendations that if pursued may further increase its effectiveness. The next stage of this research is to present the findings to senior management and discuss their implications. This is something that I would have liked to have included in this research for completeness but is too much for this piece of writing.

Chapter 4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The main aim of this research was to evaluate current practice in raising pupil examination achievement at the school. A set of research questions were constructed to address this aim, these being:

Had the initiative achieved what it set out to achieve? What evaluation of the initiative was taking place by senior management and how were the results of the evaluation being used to inform improvements? Had the identification of underachievers been left too late in the pupils' academic career and if so is it possible to identify underachievement earlier and act upon it effectively? And could the perceptions of the pupils about the initiative be used to inform the effectiveness of the school and its further improvement? With these research questions in mind a selection of data collection methods were used to obtain data to answer them. There now follows a summary of the main findings. Only the tables of the most important findings will be introduced into the main body of the text, the other tables being found in the appendix.

Questionnaire on school life: (see appendix 2)

The questionnaire was used to obtain a picture of school life across the age range, also including a group of Year 6 pupils from one of the local feeder schools to elicit pre-secondary school perceptions. It was hoped to get some idea of where in the school career at St James', underachievement first occurred and if underachievement could effectively be identified. If underachievement could be identified was the initiative happening at the optimum time to address it? If underachievement was occurring earlier as I suspected from my observations, should the initiative be moved or should other initiatives be put in place to support the Year 11 initiative?

The questionnaire was analysed by looking at motivation and demotivated responses. The categories "all of the time and most of the time" and "enjoy a lot and enjoy" were taken to be motivational if chosen. The categories "some

of the time and never” and “don’t mind and dislike” were taken to be demotivational if chosen. This is a very general definition of motivation, one that was constructed by me and chosen to help with the interpretation of the results and responses. If the semi-structured interviews had been used then this issue would have been explored further with the pupils to find out exactly what they understand by the term demotivated and how it applied to them.

If the results do show that underachievement needs addressing lower down the school then this has implications for the senior management team in terms of the effectiveness of their evaluation of the initiative. If underachievement in pupils does occur before the initiative how come this has not been identified by the senior management team’s evaluation and if it has why has it not been addressed?

Figure 4:1 Table of Male pupil attitudes to school life

	M11	M9	M6
I enjoy school	0	5	2
I enjoy lessons	1	3	3
I work hard in lessons	1	5	5
I am pleased with the work I produce	2	3	4
My teacher is pleased with the work I produce	1	3	2
At home I ask my parents for help with my work	0	1	0
In lessons I ask my teacher for help with my work	1	2	0
I get told off by my teacher in lessons	2	5	4
I am praised by my teacher in lessons	0	4	1
Total /possible 45	8	28	21

N=15

The Year 6 sample appears to be less motivated than Year 9 but more so than the Year 11 sample (see figure 4:1). This could indicate an increase in motivation in boys from Years 6 to 9 and then a decrease in motivation from Year 9 to Year 11. This however is only a tentative suggestion due to each year group being a separate sample. To further investigate this a particular group of boys needs to be followed over the five year period with their views being

solicited at the end of each key stage and then evaluated to see how the perceptions of motivation change over time. The above results only show a snapshot of motivation for three different year groups at a particular time in their educational careers, and so it is difficult to draw firm conclusions based on changing motivation of completely different samples. This is a weakness of the methodology but the best compromise due to the time period of the research. It may however point to changing motivation in boys as they progress through the Key Stages and indicates that further research is required to test this premise.

The small sample could indicate that there is a larger decrease in motivation in boys from Years 9 to 11 (see figure 4:3 for a graphical illustration). Again the above cautions need to be observed, this observation could be due to a particularly well motivated Year 9 group of boys and or a particularly demotivated Year 11 sample of boys.

These results show that the initiative is needed as Year 11 motivation and underachievement are clearly manifested at this stage, and also that the initiative was implemented too late for the pupils identified as underachieving. It could also be argued that if this initiative or a different initiative was implemented earlier it may have some impact on motivation and underachievement before pupils reach Year 11, and so is probably occurring too late.

Figure 4:2 Table of Female pupil attitudes to school life

N=15

	F11	F9	F6
I enjoy school	3	4	4
I enjoy lessons	2	3	5
I work hard in lessons	5	4	5
I am pleased with the work I produce	3	5	5
My teacher is pleased with the work I produce	5	4	4
At home I ask my parents for help with my work	0	0	2
In lessons I ask my teacher for help with my work	0	1	1
I get told off by my teacher in lessons	5	4	5
I am praised by my teacher in lessons	5	3	3
Total /possible 45	23	27	34

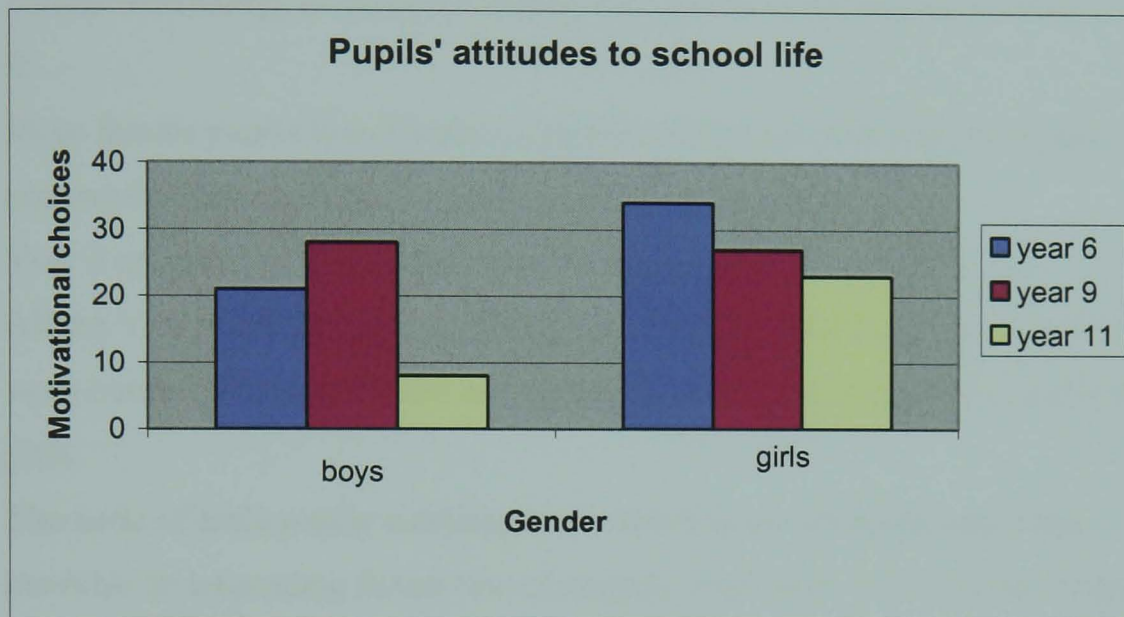
In this sample female pupil motivation is higher in Year 6 and is lower in Years 9 and 11 (figure 4:2). Again this could suggest that motivation in girls decreases from Year 6 to 11. However the same arguments for the boys apply. As we do not have the perceptions of a single year group as they progress through the Key Stages this is only a hypothesis that would need to be tested over the time a particular cohort was present at St James'. However, Year 11 female motivation is nearly three times higher than the corresponding Year 11 male pupil motivation, with Year 6 females appearing to be the most highly motivated of all male and female groups in this small sample (see figure 4:3). All female year groups feel that they work hard at lessons and that the teachers are pleased with the work that they produce. All Year groups are pleased with the work that they produce though less so in Year 11.

Interestingly few pupils, 2/15 girls and 1/15 boys, ask for help from their parents and 2/15 girls and 3/15 boys feel that they ask their teachers for help in lessons.

These results confirm the fact that underachievement may be occurring before Year 11 and that the initiative is therefore occurring too late. This is more pronounced in boys where underachievement and dropping motivation manifest

themselves earlier than with girls suggesting perhaps a greater need for intervention initiatives earlier in the school careers for boys.

Figure 4:3 Graph summarising pupils' attitudes to school life according to gender



In summary

In the sample studied 15 boys and 15 girls (10 from each year group), boys appear to be less motivated than girls with Year 11 boys being the least motivated of all groups as shown in Figure 4:3.

Motivation appears to decrease for girls from Year 6 to 11 but Year 11 girls appear to be more motivated than Year 6 boys.

Motivation for boys appears to be highest in Year 9.

Both male and female pupils claim that they do not ask for help with their work from teachers or their parents.

Girls enjoy lessons and school more than boys and are more pleased with their work than boys.

Pupils' attitudes to rewards and punishments (appendices 7 and 8)

All pupils found the thought of being punished in front of the class and in private motivating, or more accurately they would work harder in order to avoid it.

More female pupils found praise to be motivating but both boys and girls preferred praise in private to praise in front of the class.

Year 6 appeared to find praise more motivating than the other years.

All the Year 9 and 11 boys indicated that a reward would motivate them to work harder, whereas this did not appear to be a highly motivating factor for the girls.

The issue of male pupils working for a reward is an interesting one, and provides an interesting future line of enquiry especially as the Government have proposed EMAs so called Education Maintenance Allowances.

Choice of rewards was similar for both genders and all year groups (appendices 9 and 10). A school trip was the reward most selected then the reward of being able to leave school early. Only Year 11 boys did not choose either of these preferring a prize of money. Being paid to come to school is an unusual idea but one that seems to interest the Year 11 boys as a means to motivate themselves. Where this money is to come from is another issue worth exploring, one sadly that is beyond the scope of this study.

The effect of punishment on pupils (Appendices 11 and 12)

The threat of punishment is a motivating factor to both genders and all year groups, although the motivating effect decreases in both genders from Year 6 through to Year 11. Male pupils appear to take more notice of punishments from male teachers than female pupils.

For both genders in Years 11 and 9 suspension, isolation and special report are seen as the motivating punishments. These types of punishments involve the knowledge of the parents but also remove the pupil from their friends for a period of time. Being shouted at and detentions appear to have little motivating effect on secondary school pupils. In Year 6 both genders identify being shouted at as a motivating punishment (appendices 13 and 14). At precisely what point in their school careers this change takes place would be useful to determine to increase the effectiveness of the use of punishments.

All these comments tend to support the hypothesis that the perceptions of pupils are indeed worth listening to and considering in policy formulation

Teaching activities enjoyed by pupils (appendices 15 and 16)

Pupils claimed that the teaching activities that involved less teacher input were the most enjoyable, for example role play, practical, project and group work. There is a decrease in the number of teaching activities that generate motivation in both genders from Years 6 to 11 (see figure 4:4). This decrease in motivation is similar for both genders in Years 6 and 9. The biggest drop in motivation is in boys between Years 9 and 11. Year 11 boys show the lowest motivation with respect to different teaching activities, one disliking all types of teaching activity.

The majority of activities perceived as helping pupils learn are those that require little teacher intervention, the activity being the responsibility of the pupil (see appendices 15 and 16). Does this indicate a move towards independent learning by pupils or do they just want less interference from members of staff?

Figure 4:4 Graph summarising the number of teaching activities enjoyed in lessons by boys and girls



The activities perceived by pupils as not helping their learning appear to be teacher directed activities (appendices 17 and 18). This appears to confirm and support the teaching activities that they enjoy. There is an increase in identification of activities that do not help learning from Year 6 to 11 in both genders. As we will see later from the interviews, this contradicts the teaching activities that pupils believe help them to learn.

Pupil perceptions of subjects (appendices 19 and 20)

All year groups identified Physical Education as one of their favourite subjects, is this because pupils are allowed to get on with the task with little teacher intervention? All year groups identified French as their least favourite subject, again is this because French is a subject that requires considerable teacher direction?

From years 9 to 11 in male pupils and from years 6 to 11 in female pupils there is an increase in the number of subjects disliked. Year 6 boys identify more subjects they dislike than any other year group.

Maths and Physics are identified by both Year 11 boys and girls as the subjects they dislike most.

In both genders there is a decrease in the number of subjects liked most from Years 6 to 11.

It would be interesting to find out what it is about Physical Education that makes it the pupils' favourite subject and why it is that French is the least popular. The reasons as to why certain subjects are popular could then be investigated to see if they could be used to improve the less popular ones.

These perceptions could now be used to influence present policy making and supports the hypothesis that pupils have opinions that have could be used to inform policy decisions.

In summary

In this small sample motivation appears to be higher in girls than in boys with motivation decreasing as pupils go through Key Stage 4 if we assume that each separate sample reflects the perceptions on a single cohort. Year 11 boys appear to be the least highly motivated.

Praise was found to be highly motivating but pupils of both genders preferred this in private.

Boys found rewards to be highly motivating but not so with girls.

Threats were found to be motivating factors to both genders although the motivating effect decreased as pupils progressed through the school.

Types of punishment that involve the knowledge of parents and remove pupils from friends were claimed by pupils to be more motivating factors.

The majority of activities perceived as helping pupils learn were those that required little teacher intervention, the activity being the responsibility of the pupil.

In both genders there was a decrease in the number of subjects liked most from Years 6 to 11.

To summarise pupils do have opinions that provide a different perspective and contribute a useful insight into their education. These perceptions therefore offer rich data for senior managers to consider when developing policy and formulating initiatives.

The initiative may be occurring too late for maximum efficiency and perhaps targeting pupils earlier with the initiative or developing new initiatives earlier in the school may have a greater impact upon motivation and underachievement. Dropping motivation and underachievement appears to manifest themselves earlier in boys and to a greater extent which indicates targeting boys earlier may help address these problems before they reach Year 11.

Structured interviews on pupils for pre initiative perceptions (appendix 3)

These were undertaken to provide a starting point for pupils' perceptions before the initiative began in order to compare with pupils' perceptions after the initiative. This data was to give a base line and to elicit perceptions about the mentees as learners in order to find out if they felt that the initiative had any relevance to them, if they felt that the initiative had worked for them and to gain insight into underachievement at St James'. These observations could then be used to assess if the initiative was occurring too late and if it should be started earlier and just how successful they felt the initiative actually was.

All of the pupils (N=10) when interviewed revealed that they were not working to the best of their ability. The responses fell into three main groups

Group 1 those who said they were not working very hard, 4 male 2 female.

Group 2 those who said that they were now improving, 2 males.

Group 3 those who were working hard in some subjects but not in others, 2 males.

Reasons given for not working very hard for group 1 from two males were:

“I start the coursework but then I can’t be bothered to finish”

“I’ve not got the drive to start, there’s no urgency. I need pushing and more attention, some teachers don’t appear to care, so why bother, if they won’t help what’s the point?”

Reasons given for group 2 from one male were:

“I am now (working hard) but not before. I had a bad Year 10, didn’t seem important so I had a laugh”

“I can’t believe how quickly the mocks have come, suppose it will be even quicker now for the GCSEs, made me realise I now have to work.”

Reasons given for group 3 from one male were:

“Not sure why in some lessons, just lacking the motivation to do the coursework I suppose”

“ Only need four Cs to go to college, know which subjects I will get them in so what’s the point of working hard in the others? May as well use my time in my good subjects!”

When asked if they would achieve the grades they wanted five pupils thought they would the rest including both females said they would not.

The reasons for not achieving were identified by all five pupils as not working hard enough or to the very best of their ability.

Interestingly, two of the five boys who felt that they were on target were only interested in achieving four or five GCSEs at grade C.

All ten pupils felt that they could do a lot better.

The ways that the pupils identified that they could do better have been summarised in the following table:

Figure 4:5 Table showing ways identified by pupils for their overall improvement in their examination results.

	male	female
complete work	5	
ask for help	4	2
listen in class	3	2
concentrate	3	1
revise	2	
more effort	1	
stop being disruptive	4	

It is interesting to note here that the very activities the pupils have identified as being necessary for their improvement, asking for help and listening to the teacher, are the very activities that were identified in the school life questionnaire as those not helping them to learn. Perhaps when the pressure is on and they are focusing on achieving their grades they become more focused and realise that some of the teacher led learning activities are in fact useful. Also, at this late stage of the game they may also realise that they are doing this for themselves and the opinions of their peers is possibly not as important as they first believed. Tangled in with this, is the fact that school life is drawing to a close. Some of those peers that they were trying to impress with a ‘couldn’t care less attitude’ to their learning will possibly not be with them as they continue their academic careers in different educational institutions. The importance then of impressing these peers could be perceived as diminishing the closer the final examinations approach.

Another problem, that of being disruptive in lessons, was commented on by a male pupil.

“I’m easily distracted, I’ve got in with the wrong crowd. If I ignore them and do my work they fob me off, but I’m getting frustrated as some of my friends are doing better than me and they now ignore me. Can’t win can I?”

Only one pupil talked in general terms of “more effort” the other pupils tried to identify specific strategies that they thought would help them to improve. This is interesting as it is showing that the pupils are starting to reflect on their own learning and are identifying specific ways for targeting their own improvement.

All ten pupils thought that the idea of being mentored was likely to be successful for them. The idea that a senior member of staff was interested in what they were doing appeared to be a motivating factor in their efforts to improve.

In summary

All of the pupils interviewed revealed that they were not working to the best of their ability.

Male pupils who felt they were on target had set themselves low targets (4 grade C GCSEs).

All ten pupils felt that they could do a lot better, and were able to identify specific areas and strategies they could use to improve their performance. The very activities the pupils identified as being necessary for their improvement, asking for help and listening to the teacher, were the very activities identified in the questionnaire as those not helping them to learn.

It would appear that underachievement can be caused by many factors and is not as simple as I first imagined when I started the research, the questionnaires providing a valuable insight into this. Within this very small sample of ten identified underachieving pupils I identified three different groups of underachievers. Within each of these groups there may have been sub groups. If we consider underachievement on a whole school basis rather than at the level identified in this research, that is pupils targeted to achieve 5 or more grade A* to C grades, how many further groups could we identify? If we want to consider St James’ as an effective school then by the definition previously given we should be addressing all of these groups.

Should we be targeting each pupil on an individual basis rather than using a one strategy fits all approach? Should we have different strategies for each identified group and if so which strategy should we use for which group? Should the strategies be whole school so that each department uses the appropriate whole school strategy for each identified group or should departments be allowed to develop their own subject specific strategies? Do we target pupils who are underachieving in just one subject or a specified number of subjects? Should the school pick an ability range or all ability ranges? These are just a few questions that have arisen as the research has progressed, and there may be many more to identify and resolve. If the school is serious about the issues of underachieving pupils then these are some of the issues that the senior management team and heads of department should be addressing. The findings in this part of the research appear to have created more questions than answers. However, now that the questions have been identified there is a platform on which the school can move forward on the issue of underachievement and its effective management. Rather than addressing all of the questions and all of the underachieving pupils, senior management can identify an area to work on initially and expand the initiative in a way that best supports underachieving pupils at St James'. Ideally a full evaluation needs to be undertaken on the present initiative on a single cohort as they progress through the school. This would however, take a lot of time and may not be perceived by senior management as cost effective in terms of the use of time and potential benefits.

The issues of underachievement now appear to be very complex to me, each pupil is an individual whose set of circumstances are unique and that a blanket initiative may not be focused enough for every pupil. A mentor/mentee system which can take into account a pupil's circumstances may be a way forward. There are still questions with this approach for example, which pupils are identified as mentees and how is the decision arrived at? Which staff are mentors? Could older pupils act as mentors? Which mentors are placed with which mentee? How many mentees does each mentor have? When do meetings between mentees and mentors take place and how often? Where do

these meetings take place? Who would be responsible for coordinating the initiative? What impact would this have on timetabling? What would be the financial costs involved in terms of supply teachers if mentors are to be taken off the timetable? What would be the impact on staff morale if they are asked to cover mentors' lessons in their own non-contact time? How will these issues be coordinated, managed and evaluated and by whom? If the issues of underachievement are complex so are the attempted solutions. Perhaps this is why a political decision was made by senior management to target a small group of pupils on the GCSE grade D/C boundary who were thought capable of gaining 5 A* to C grades.

What this research has provided are lots of questions. The generation of these questions supports one of the research questions, that is that the initiative should have been evaluated. These questions also support the hypothesis that pupils do have constructive comments to make about the initiative that can have far reaching implications for senior management decisions.

Questionnaire on pupils for post initiative perceptions (appendix 5)

The previous section collected and discussed the perceptions of the identified underachieving pupils before they experienced the initiative. This section elicited the perceptions of the underachieving pupils after they had gone through the initiative. Once analysed the results of both research tools could be compared. From this it could be determined from the pupils' responses whether they felt the initiative had a positive effect in addressing underachievement and if it had any impact in raising their grades. Their comments could also be used to assess if the initiative was occurring at the most appropriate time for them.

Section 1-about the project N=17

When asked what they felt the project was for, 7 pupils felt that it was to raise their grades, 5 said that it was to help underachievers, 3 made no comment perhaps not understanding the question or not knowing what the project was

about. If the latter is the case then this is an implication for the mentors, that has to be addressed.

When asked why they were identified as underachievers, 10 pupils said it was because they were not reaching their potential, 3 felt it was because they were on the D/C borderline and 1 pupil felt that it was because he was struggling with his coursework.

The ways that pupils felt the project had helped them were quite wide ranging. Ten different responses were given. 3 pupils said that it suddenly made them realise just how little time was left until their exams. This is worrying as this is an issue that all the staff should be addressing. 6 felt that it helped them to realise what they were capable of, helping them also to focus and giving them confidence for their exams. 3 felt that the project had showed them how to revise effectively, and 2 felt that the project helped them to identify their strengths and weaknesses and where they were going wrong. Only one pupil felt that the project did not help them as it had started too late in their academic career.

16 pupils felt that they could not have done better with out the project with 1 pupil making no comment. Reasons given were that 5 pupils felt they were showed how to improve, 4 pupils realised they needed help, and 4 pupils needed the extra help and encouragement.

8 pupils found that target setting was the most useful part of the project, 5 pupils felt meeting with their mentors was most useful and meeting with mentors and parents was seen as useful by 3 of the pupils.

16 of the 17 pupils felt that the project was useful for future cohorts, the main reason being given by 10 pupils was, to give future pupils the extra push or help and support they would need. 5 pupils felt that the project was useful to make future pupils aware of how to improve.

15 of the pupils felt that the project should be started earlier in their school careers. 6 pupils felt it should be started in Year 10, 3 pupils felt it should be started straight after their SATS and 2 pupils felt it should be done at the start of Year 11 (all these dates have implications for the selection of underachievers).

Perceptions on improvements for the project. 6 pupils felt that the project could be improved through more meetings with their mentors (it would be interesting to know how many meetings they had). 5 pupils felt that more consultation was needed with subject teachers, underachievers being identified earlier and more pupils identified and placed onto the project.

Summary of Main Points

Most of the:

- pupils were well aware of what the project was about. However, 3 were apparently unaware which indicates a more careful explanation is required to all of the underachieving pupils by the mentors.
- pupils also showed a good understanding of why they were identified.
- pupils identified a number of reasons as how the project had helped them, 16 pupils identifying positive benefits with only one pupil feeling the project had not helped them.
- pupils felt they would not have done better without the project as it provided them with the extra help they felt that they needed (one issue again for management is the point that the project showed pupils how little time was left before the exams). A point suggesting the initiative was perhaps occurring too late.
- pupils felt that the most important part of the project was the target setting, involvement of parents was not seen as so important.
- pupils felt the project was useful for future cohorts, again extra help and support being the main reasons identified for this. This appears to be evidence suggesting the success of the initiative from the pupils' perspective.

- pupils felt that the project should be started earlier in the pupils' careers, perhaps at the beginning of Year 10 or as early as after the SATs in Year 9. This has implications for the way underachievers are identified as the mock examinations, which are done in Year 11 just before Christmas, are used in the identification process. Again this appears to be more evidence suggesting the initiative was occurring too late.
- pupils felt that the project could be improved by more meetings with mentors, and also more input and consultation with subject tutors. This appears to be evidence that supports the hypothesis that evaluation of the initiative is required.

Pupils therefore felt that the initiative was worthwhile and helped them to achieve the grades they were aiming for. More specifically pupils felt that the initiative showed them how to improve. It also made them realise that they did need help in terms of support and they valued the extra help and encouragement and the interest taken in them and the extra push to get them working to their best ability. From this point of view there appears to be evidence from the pupils' comments that the initiative is working

The fact that the initiative started too late in their academic careers was commented on and tends to support initiatives starting for Year 10 once the SATs results have been published, perhaps as early as Year 7, with possible identification of underachieving pupils in Year 6 in the feeder schools. This will require very close liaison between class teachers in the feeder schools and the relevant Head of Year. Also, the criteria used for the identification of underachieving pupils must be common not only with St James' but also between all feeder schools. Information about Year 6 pupils is already collected by the relevant Head of Year on their pre-induction visits to the feeder schools. These underachieving pupils now need to be more vigorously targeted with a mentor system once they start at St James', a system now started in Year 7 due to the findings of this study, rather than just appear on a list.

Section 2 - parental involvement

All pupils felt that it was a good idea to get the involvement of parents. This is different to the mentor parent interviews and seems to indicate separating parents from school. Pupils appeared happy for parent involvement at home but not directly in school.

11 of the 17 pupils felt that parental involvement did help them, reasons given that the parents pushed, helped, supported and encouraged them. 1 pupil however, stated that the project was discussed once and then forgotten with their parents.

Summary of Main Points

- All pupils felt it was a good idea to get the parents involved in the project.
- Parental involvement was wanted at home rather than in school.
- Parental involvement helped pupils achieve.

It would have been useful to elicit the parental perceptions of the initiative and how they felt it impacted upon their child's achievement? It would also have been useful to find out how they felt when their child was identified as an underachieving pupil, if they were called in for interview with the mentor and their perceptions of the value of the meeting and of the initiative, issues perhaps for the next evaluation of the initiative.

Section 3 – mentors

Meetings with mentors appeared inconsistent. 5 pupils had meetings once a week, 3 pupils met with mentors only once, 3 pupils met not much, 1 pupil met four times, 1 pupil met once every two weeks and one pupil met when the mentor thought it best. This seems to indicate a lack of consistency between the approach of the mentors, problems with setting up meetings or forgetting to

attend meetings. Again, this is an area for possible future attention, which may possibly be helped by a member of staff with responsibility for overseeing and coordinating the whole project. This reinforces the need for an evaluation to take place as this inconsistency needs addressing for the further improvement of the initiative.

Discussion with mentors covered a wide area of topics. 5 pupils looked at revision strategies, 5 pupils looked at sorting out difficulties with coursework and classwork and 2 pupils looked at what it really means to work harder. This wide range of topics could indicate the range of problems experienced by underachieving pupils whilst at school, or the different approaches adopted by the mentors.

12 of the pupils felt that they had had an input into the discussions and therefore felt in control of what was happening to them, with only two pupils stating that they had no input at all.

The extra time with staff helped pupils in the following areas: what they had to do to achieve, boosting their confidence and how to effectively organise their time. 4 pupils made no comment.

Opinion was divided on pupils choosing their mentors. 7 of the pupils said that they would like to have chosen their mentor. Another 7 said they would not have liked to have chosen their mentor. 3 pupils made no comment. The 7 who wanted to choose said they would have preferred another member of staff, the 7 pupils who said they did not want to choose, was because they felt it would have made no difference, they had a good mentor anyway, or they may have chosen for the wrong reasons.

Summary of Main Points

- The meetings and approaches between mentors varied.
- The number of meetings needs to be reviewed by the management team if a consistent approach is required.

- Pupils were allowed an input into the meetings which gave them a feeling of ownership and control over the process that was happening to them.
- The extra time given to the pupils was seen as beneficial enabling them to focus on what they had to do, how to organise their time and it built confidence in themselves, illustrating the thoughtful comments provided by the pupils
- The question of choosing appropriate mentors was divided but placing pupils with mentors is important in the success of the project.

The improvements suggested by the pupils included having more meetings with their mentors. This was because some of the pupils did not appear to meet with their mentors as often as other pupils did and felt they had missed out. This points to a more consistent approach being required which appears to have been missed but for this evaluation.

Also, some pupils felt that more meetings would be valuable and worthwhile. Again, this tends to suggest the need for the process to be coordinated by a senior member of staff to ensure meeting times are kept to and the re-timetabling of any missed meetings.

Section 4 – themselves

This section was used to try and find out the pupils' perceptions of themselves, to compare with predictions of the analytical tools.

All the pupils appeared to have an idea of what an underachieving pupil was. 12 pupils stated it was someone who was not reaching their full potential. 4 pupils felt it was someone who did not work as hard as they could. 1 response felt it was someone who could work better. The majority of pupils appear to have a more sophisticated view of what underachievement is. The response of not working hard enough may only be one contributing factor towards underachievement and not reaching their full potential whatever that reason may be.

The reasons given for their own underachievement were given as follows:

6 of the pupils claimed that they were bored and that there was a lack of interest in what was happening in their lessons and in school. 4 pupils felt that their underachievement was due to a lack of effort on their part and of them being lazy. 4 pupils claimed it was due to examination pressure and not wanting to, or being able to revise. Lack of understanding, not concentrating and skipping school were other reasons given for their underachievement.

10 of the pupils achieved five or more A* to C grades. 5 pupils achieved four A* to C grades. 1 pupil achieved three grade A* to C. 1 pupil achieved one grade A* to C.

Of these 17 targeted underachievers, only 5 pupils felt that they had achieved their potential, the remaining 12 pupils feeling that they had underachieved.

Perceptions of how they could have reached their full potential were given as follows:

5 pupils felt that revising more would have helped. 4 pupils felt they would have had a better chance of attaining their potential if they had worked hard from the start of Year 10. 3 pupils felt that higher levels of concentration in class would have helped. 2 pupils claimed that trying harder would have helped them reach their potential. Only 1 pupil felt that they had done their very best.

Summary of Main Points

- There was a general consensus between pupils about what an underachieving pupil was.
- Reasons given for their underachievement ranged from being bored and lazy to examination pressure and skipping lessons.
- Most of the pupils felt that they had not achieved their full potential. (At this point it is a pity that this issue was not addressed in the questionnaire, as the pupils own perceptions of their full potential would have been an

interesting factor to compare with the other data. This could then have been used to see if the expectations of their potential was over optimistic when compared with the other analytical tools. This is a shortcoming with the questionnaire that was not picked up).

These perceptions were considered to be sophisticated showing understanding of the issues of underachievement and how this impacts on their ability and achievement. Pupils were able to give reasons for their underachievement and offer solutions. This is again more support for the hypothesis that pupils' perceptions provide useful information that could be considered in policy formulation.

Section 5 – destinations

This section provides information about pupils' destinations after their GCSEs to provide insight into the apparent success of the pupils.

7 of the 17 pupils are now in full time post 16 education. 5 pupils are in part time education with a part time job. 4 pupils are in apprenticeships with one day a week release to college. 1 pupil is working full-time in a motorway service station.

Summary of Main Points

- 12 of the 17 pupils are following education courses.
- 4 of the 17 pupils are in apprenticeships.
- 1 pupil is in full-time employment.
- At present none of the 17 pupils are unemployed.

As all these pupils were identified as underachieving, this data shows how well they have done and from their comments indicates that for them they felt the initiative was a success. However, as there was no control group to compare

with we cannot say with any confidence that this success was directly the result of the initiative.

Overall Summary

Pupils were aware of what the strategy was about and why they had been identified.

Pupils felt they would not have done as well without the strategy.

Pupils felt that the strategy had been left too late in their academic careers.

Pupils offered advice on improvements for the future running of the strategy.

Pupils identified different approaches to the strategy by mentors.

Pupils felt that the correct placement with mentors was vital for a successful outcome.

Pupils felt that they had not achieved their full potential.

What all these findings do point to is that there needs to be some sort of forum, a staff student council for example, where the pupils' voice can be heard and their opinions considered. A system that allows pupils' suggestions to be put forward by pupil council members to be discussed and voted on. What this research has shown is that pupils can make a valuable contribution to the success of an initiative and perhaps need to be considered seriously in any evaluation and subsequent policy formulation.

Also, some of the points made by the pupils, not previously picked up by the senior management team, indicate that the whole initiative would benefit from a thorough evaluation to tackle some of the issues raised by the pupils, like the inconsistent approach of mentors, for its improvement.

Lesson observation of disruptive underachieving male pupil (see appendix4)

A female colleague asked me to observe a lesson in which an identified underachieving pupil was causing problems. The following data summarises what occurred.

The pupil arrived three minutes late but was not the last to arrive. The lesson was French and it was the top group.

The pupil spent 15 of the 45 minutes off task. Whilst off task he engaged in the following activities.

Talking to neighbour	8 minutes
Messing with scissors	3 minutes
Left seat to go to rubbish bin	1 minute
Copying from neighbour	1 minute
Carrying on with interview	1 minute
Staring at pen	1 minute

The pupil spent 6 further minutes with his head on his arms. When talking to the teacher after the lesson she stated this behaviour was quite usual and was considered by her as being off task. If this is the case then the total time off task in the lesson was 21 of the 45 minutes.

The disruption caused was only minor in that it only affected two other pupils. However, his behaviour is allowing him to be on task for only half of the lesson.

Unstructured interview of disruptive underachieving male pupil.

Following on from the lesson observation I conducted an interview in the format of a conversation to try and better understand why the pupil was behaving the way he was in the French lesson. The following data elicited provided an insight into underachievement at St James' from an identified disruptive underachieving pupil.

Pupil profile:

YELLIS results November 1999 predicted that this pupil had the potential to achieve grade C in all ten of his GCSE subjects.

His Year 10 examinations in June 2000 show two grade Cs five grade Ds one grade E and two grade Fs

His Year 11 mock examinations in December 2000 show two grade Cs three grade Ds two grade Es and three grade Fs

To summarise the main points of the interview:

- The pupil wants to get good grades but is not prepared to work for them.
- He cannot see the point of French, he will never go there, they all speak English so what is the point trying to understand and write it?
- He sees why he has to work hard but just cannot be bothered.
- He was told he only needed four grade Cs to get into college so why put pressure on him to get more than four?
- He knows which four he can get and French is not one of them.
- He indicated that he is worried about failing but if he does a friend has said he can go and work with him.
- He does want help but only on his terms.
- He wants to drop some of the subjects to concentrate on the four subjects he needs for college.

- He feels that coursework is a complete waste of time putting too much pressure on him. He would rather spend his time doing work for the exam not for coursework, which he sees as a distraction from his studies.
- He feels that his behaviour in lessons is not as bad as is made out. If a teacher can spend ten minutes at the beginning of a lesson talking then why can't he do the same?

These comments confirm the previous research discussed in the literature review about the nature of underachievement.

Comparison, analysis and evaluation of predictive analytical tools used by senior management team.

Analytical Tools

This analysis has taken place to try and determine empirically if the initiative has been a success in raising the examination results of underachieving pupils and if so by how much. If the data suggests the initiative is working then ways can be investigated for further improvement. If it is not working an evaluation is needed to see why that is the case and then if it is worth the time and effort to make it work.

Over the past four years at St James', pupils have been identified as underachievers using various analytical tools by the senior management. These tools are as follows:

- YELLIS tool- an examination taken at the beginning of Year 10 which claims to be able to predict the pupils potential grade in all areas of the school curriculum.
- Potential grade tool - this is the grade that the pupil is expected to attain in a particular subject if they were to do as well as they could. It is predicted by

the staff based on the pupils' progress, attitude, coursework, homework and internal subject assessments.

- Predicted grade tool- this is the grade that was achieved by pupils in the Year 11 mock examinations that are taken just before Christmas.

The following areas were looked at to judge the success of identifying the underachieving pupils by the senior management team:

- A comparison of the number of grades predicted for each analytical tool compared to what the pupils actually achieved.
- A comparison of individual subject grades for each analytical tool against the actual subject grades achieved. This then gives an indication, grade for grade, which is the most accurate analytical tool used by the school.
- A comparison of the predicted 5 or more C grades and above for each tool.
- The number of grade C's and above predicted by each tool, was then compared against the actual achieved again to assess the accuracy of each analytical tool.
- Finally a comparison of each year group's grades were analysed to see if there was an increase in grades to assess if this may have been due to the initiative.

The accuracy of each tool was assessed to determine if the technique for identifying underachieving pupils was accurate. The whole point of the initiative was to improve the examination performance of underachieving pupils. If this identification was inaccurate then the initiative would not be aimed at the pupils it was intended and therefore could not be judged a success.

Figure 4:6 The predicted number of grades for each analytical tool compared to the actual number of grades achieved by the identified underachieving pupils

Cohort	Tool	Prediction of tool compared to actual A*-C grades achieved
1998	Potential	More grades predicted than achieved
1998	Predictive	Less grades predicted than achieved
2000	Potential	More grades predicted than achieved
2000	Predictive	Less grades predicted than achieved (but very close)
2000	YELLIS	More grades predicted than achieved
2001	Potential	More grades predicted than achieved
2001	Predictive	Less grades predicted than achieved
2001	YELLIS	More grades predicted than achieved

In this small sample for all cohorts studied the Potential analytical tool always predicts more A*-C GCSE examination grades than is actually achieved. For all cohorts the Predictive analytical tool always predicts less A*-C GCSE examination grades than is actually achieved. For the two cohorts where used the YELLIS analytical tool always predicts more A*-C GCSE examination grades than is actually achieved.

The Potential analytical tool would be expected to over predict the total number of A*-C grades as this is the tool which is based on teacher expectations of pupils’ performance and coursework marks. These grades predicted by the Potential analytical tool are passed onto pupils as target grades and are often designed to show pupils what they are expected to achieve if they perform to the best of their ability, a confidence booster.

The Predictive analytical tool also produces results that would be expected, that is, they under predict the number of grades pupils actually achieve. This can be explained by the fact that the tool is based upon the pupils’ mock examination results that take place in December, at the end of the first term of Year 11. Most mock papers are the previous years GCSE examination papers. As the

mocks take place so early in Year 11 and many subjects may not have completed the syllabus there will be gaps in the pupils' knowledge that may be examined by the mock papers. Pupils may also not attach the same level of importance to the mock examinations as they do the actual GCSEs, which determine the actual grades they will achieve, and so less intensive or even last minute revision may take place. These factors may then contribute to pupils achieving lower grades than they actually achieve in their GCSE examinations that are sat six months later.

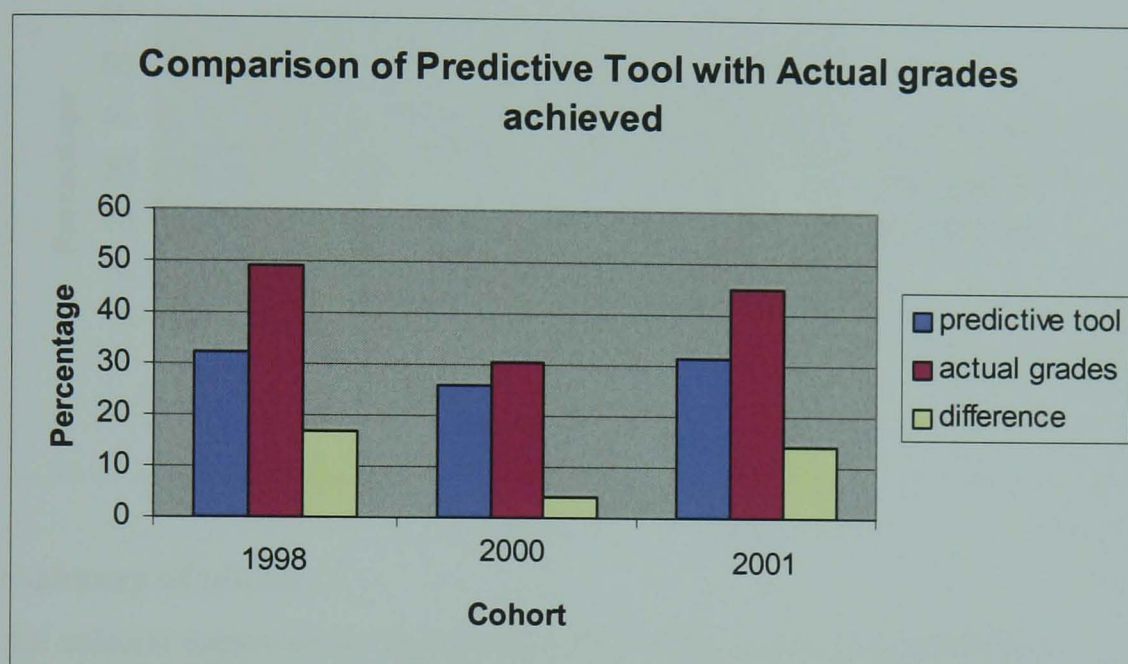
It is hard to comment on the YELLIS results as the actual way that Durham University arrives at its predictions has not been made clear to me. Also, there are only two cohorts worth of information for this tool. All that can be said is that from the information available at the time of the study, the YELLIS tool over predicted the actual grades achieved in the GCSE examinations.

It would appear that the school's in-house predictive analytical tools produce an outcome either side of the actual grades achieved by pupils in their GCSE examinations. The senior management team needs to assess the benefits of YELLIS for St James' and decide if the costs are justifiable when compared to the in-house system that already operates.

In its defense YELLIS is another means of predicting pupils grades based on a process of mathematical and English problems being externally set and marked. It could be argued that this is a different method of predicting grades and therefore worthy of use in the identification of underachievers, as it brings a separate external method of identification.

Analysis of predictive analytical tools used by SMT compared to actual grades achieved by identified underachieving pupils.

Figure 4:7 Graph showing a comparison of the Predictive tool with Actual A*-C grades achieved between cohorts of identified underachievers

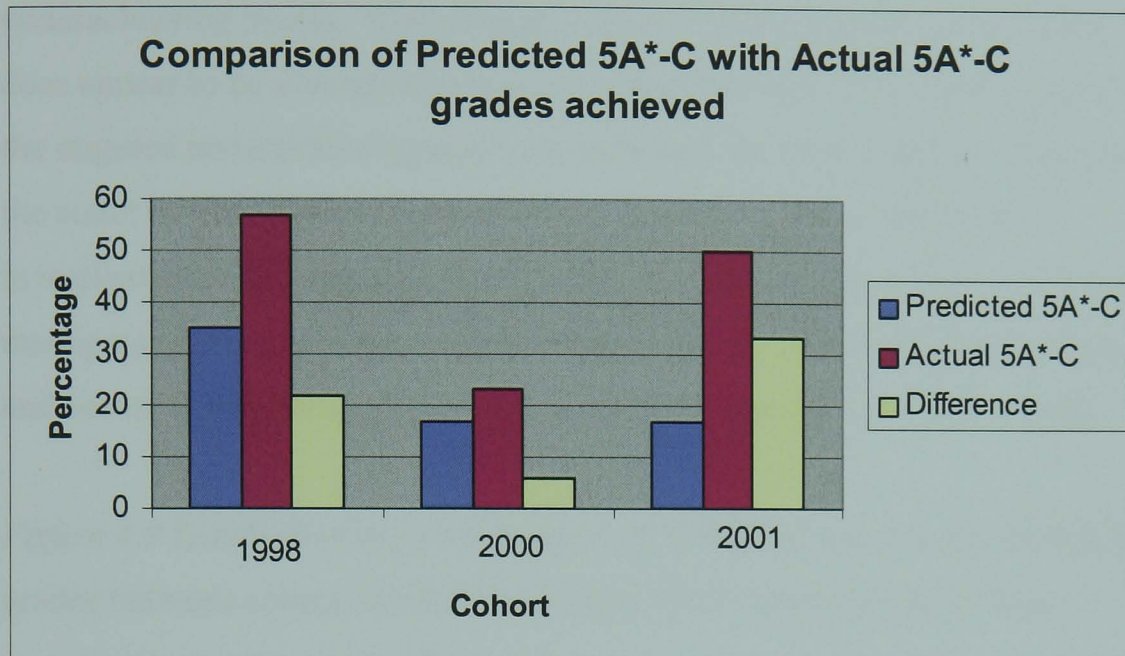


Summary of results:

- Cohort 98 showed the biggest improvement with 16.9% more grade A*-C than Predicted (appendix 24).
- Cohort 98 produced more grades A*-C than the other two cohorts when compared to their Predicted A*-C grades.
- All cohorts show an increase in the number of grades A*-C when compared to their Predicted A*-C grades.

These results tend to support the previous observation that the Predictive analytical tool under-predicts the actual grades pupils achieve. It could also be argued that the increase in actual grades may be due to the effect of the initiative. Once again this is a tentative suggestion with there being no control group with which to compare. The increase may also be due to more effective teaching and learning and differences in ability of cohorts.

Figure 4:8 Graph showing a comparison of the Predictive tool with Actual 5 A*-C grades achieved between cohorts of identified underachievers



Summary of results:

All cohorts improved on their Predicted 5 A*-C grades (appendix 23).

- Cohort 01 produced a bigger percentage increase in the number of pupils gaining 5 A*-C grades than Predicted.
- Cohort 98 produced a higher percentage of pupils gaining 5 A*-C grades than any of the other cohorts.

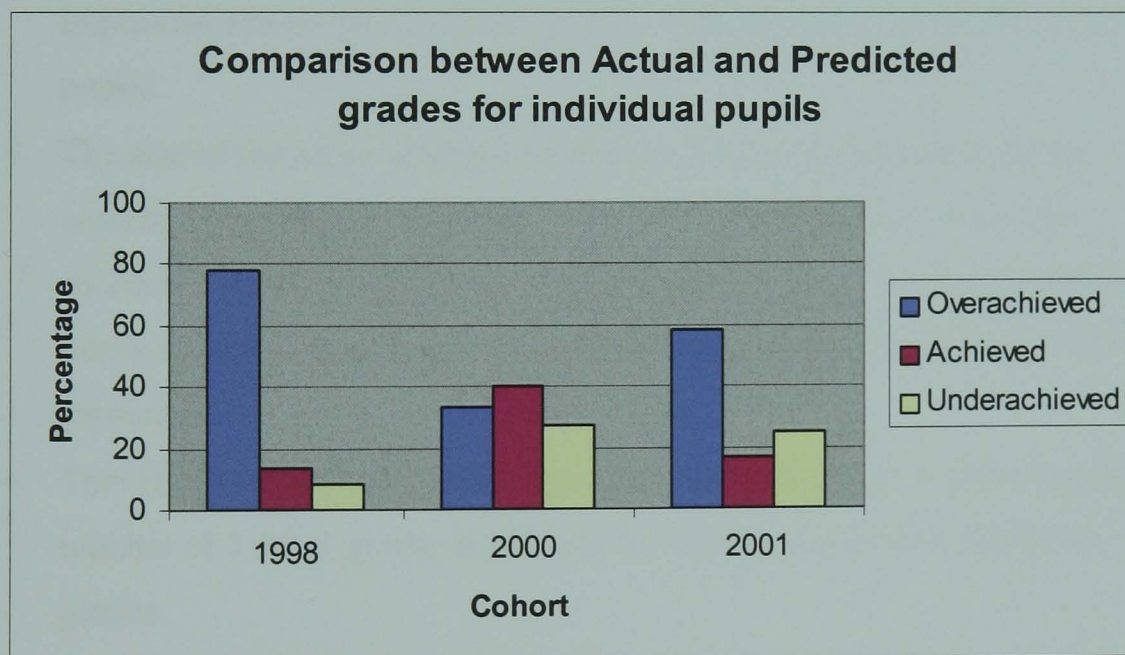
If we look a little deeper at the results and compare the predicted 5 A*-C grades with the actual achieved 5 A*-C grades the percentage difference is greater than in each previous example:

1. For cohort 98 there is an increase of 1.3 times ($57/35=1.3$).
2. For cohort 00 there is an increase of 1.4 times ($23/17=1.4$).
3. For cohort 01 there is an increase of 2.4 times ($50/17=2.4$).

As the underachieving pupils were targeted on the 5 A*-C boundary this difference seems to suggest that the increase when compared to the A*-C grades results may be due more to the initiative rather than the issue of under-prediction by the Predictive analytical tool, as this difference increases each year.

These results tend to suggest that the initiative is slowly achieving what it set out to achieve, to raise the examination performance of identified targeted underachieving pupils. Even though each cohort is a separate sample there does appear to be a steady increase in the number of 5 A*-C grades achieved by the targeted underachieving pupils in each year, and this could be interpreted as the result of the effects of the initiative. This obviously needs further investigation with subsequent cohorts but is an encouraging sign for the senior management team that the initiative may in fact be helping to improve results and seems to becoming more effective at doing this each successive year.

Figure 4:9 Graph showing a comparison of Predicted and Actual individual grades between cohorts for individual identified underachieving pupils



Summary of results:

- Cohort 98 pupils overachieved their Predicted grades more than any other cohort.
- Cohort 00 pupils underachieved their Predicted grades more than any other cohort.

In summary it appears that:

- More individual subject grades were improved on in cohort 98, then came cohort 01, than cohort 00.
- Cohort 01 produced the highest percentage increase in 5 A*-C grades compared to their Predicted, then came cohort 98, then cohort 00.
- When comparing the Predicted grades of individual pupils to Actual grades achieved, cohort 98 showed the biggest percentage increase then cohort 01 then cohort 00.
- It appears that cohort 98 was the more successful year for gaining C grades and above but that cohort 01 showed the biggest improvement in 5 A*-C grades.

Conclusions

- The initiative appears to be worthwhile with respect to making improvements on the Predicted grades of the identified underachieving pupils.
- The size of the group targeted appears to have some influence on the amount of success of the group. The larger group appears to be less successful than the smaller ones. This could be due to the large number of pupils assigned to each mentor, perhaps diluting the effectiveness of the mentoring.
- The 01 cohort appears to have been the most successful at improving the number of 5 A*-C grades achieved when compared to their Predicted grades.
- As far as the pupils are concerned the initiative was very worthwhile to them and they offered positive recommendations for the improvement of the initiative.
- I would like to think that the improvement in 5 A*-C grades in cohort 01 was due to a more structured approach by the mentors. My only feedback on approaches is from feedback from an informal discussion with other mentors which pointed to a more structured formal mentoring for cohorts 01 rather than the informal chat of previous cohorts.

It could be tentatively suggested therefore, from the evidence gathered that the initiative has made a positive impact on the examination performance of the targeted underachieving pupils. However, with there being no control group the evidence supporting this conclusion can not be considered as strong as I would like. This does however provide strong support for a rigorous evaluation to take place to determine the effectiveness of the initiative.

As far as the pupils are concerned the initiative did make a positive impact on not only their examination performance but also their attitude and preparation for their exams. They also made highly perceptive comments about the initiative.

Comparison of analytical tools

In all cohorts the Potential 5 A*-C grades predicted by staff was never achieved. This is perhaps not surprising as staff tend to have high expectations to give pupils a target to aim for. However, as a predictive tool it is not accurate alone for these underachieving pupils.

For cohort 01 YELLIS predicted the right amount of 5 A*-C grades achieved. However, on closer inspection only 50% of pupils predicted 5 A*-C grades by YELLIS achieved this prediction, meaning that 50% of pupils predicted by YELLIS to achieve 5 A*-C grades failed to reach this target. Of these six pupils remaining who achieved 5 A*-C grades 5 of the 6 were predicted by YELLIS to not achieve any grade C's, the remaining pupil was predicted to only achieve 2 grade C's.

In terms of individual pupils it appears that YELLIS is not as accurate at predicting 5 A*-C grades as it is for predicting the outcome for an entire year group. This is something that must be taken into account by senior management if they are looking to YELLIS to provide them with individual pupil predictions or whole year group predictions.

In all cases the pupils' actual grades exceeded the Predicted grades. This is encouraging as the Predicted grades are based on Year 10 and mock examination performance and if exceeded shows an improvement over the final year which is a success for underachieving pupils. This could be due to the initiative. At this stage it is difficult to draw firm conclusions as a control group has never been set up.

Summary

- Each predictive tool individually is not accurate when compared to the actual final grades produced.
- YELLIS tends to be more accurate at predicting how well a whole cohort will do and is not particularly accurate at predicting individual pupil performance.
- Potential grades tend to over predict how pupils will do, this is due to the nature of the tool where staff intentionally aim high to try and keep pupils motivated.
- Predicted grades tend to under predict how pupils will perform. Again, this could be due to the nature of the tool which is based on mock examinations.
- With all the cohorts there was an improvement on Predicted grades. This could indicate that the initiative is achieving its aims. That is, identifying pupils who are underachieving and raising their performance. It also could indicate the use of more than one diagnostic analytical tool is preferable than the use of one.

The task of compiling the Predictive analytical tool and the Potential analytical tool needs to be evaluated by senior management to see if the outcomes justify the teacher time to produce them. The Predictive analytical tool which is derived from the pupils' mock GCSE examination results is a task that has to be undertaken as it is these grades that are reported to parents and in many cases, are forwarded onto colleges as the pupils' predicted grades. The fact that the tool under predicts the pupils' grades must be made clear to the colleges if they

are to be used as a basis to offer students places on courses in their establishments. On the other hand it is assumed by the senior management team that an under prediction of grades is a strong motivator for pupils to improve and to keep on working through the final two terms of their GCSE courses.

The Potential analytical tool provides the higher expectations of staff for their pupils. Therefore, using the Predictive analytical tool to show pupils where there are at and the Potential analytical tool to show pupils what they are capable of and where they could get to appears to be a useful strategy to raise all pupils motivation. These sources of information would be better used if a strategy was discussed with pupils identifying what steps need to be taken to reach their potential grades. The analytical tools, if used in this way may be a step forward for generating a system of using assessment data to aid pupils' learning rather than to label them into a particular grade bracket.

The YELLIS analytical tool in the two cohorts used over predicted the grades that were actually achieved, the results being similar to those produced by the Potential analytical tool. It appears to me that the school has developed its own in-house predictive system with a similar accuracy to YELLIS and its possible replacement of YELLIS which costs the school money and teacher time in its administration may benefit from an evaluation based on financial factors. Are the results produced by YELLIS worth these costs? There is another factor involved that impinges on any decision made by senior management on the future of YELLIS. The YELLIS tests are administered to Year 10 pupils at the beginning of the academic year, the results coming back to the school in the second half term before Christmas. These predictive results arrive in school almost a complete academic year before the Potential analytical tool is used to calculate the pupils potential GCSE grades. The senior management need to assess this factor of early arrival of data against the cost of the YELLIS tool. Just how important is having this information early? School targets are set based on this information which is required for County administration and also for future school planning and target setting. Is the accuracy of this tool

appropriate for these decisions? If not could the Potential analytical tool be constructed earlier in the school academic year and if so how accurate would it be?

Management issues and recommendations

1. The initiative appears to be worthwhile with respect to improving the Actual grades achieved for the underachieving pupils.
2. The project showed pupils how little time was left before the exams and it can be concluded that the initiative was occurring too late.
3. The most important part of the project was felt by pupils to be target setting.
4. The project should be started earlier in the pupils' careers, perhaps at the beginning of Year 10 or as early as after the SATs in Year 9. This has implications for the way underachievers are identified as the mock examinations, which are done in Year 11 just before Christmas, are used in the identification process.
5. The project could be improved by more meetings with mentors, and also more input and consultation with subject tutors.
6. Meetings and approaches between mentors varied.
7. The number of meetings needs to be reviewed by the management team if a consistent approach is required.
8. The extra time given to the pupils was seen as beneficial enabling them to focus on what they had to do, how to organise their time and it built confidence in themselves.
9. The size of the group targeted appears to have some influence on the amount of success of the group. The larger group appears to be less successful than the smaller ones. This may be due to the large number of pupils assigned to each mentor, perhaps diluting the effectiveness of the mentoring.
10. Each predictive tool individually is not accurate when compared to the actual final grades produced.

How the findings relate to the research questions.

With all this data we can now return to the research questions and see if they can be answered. Is the initiative setting out to do what it is meant to? The data shows that the examination results of the identified underachieving pupils do improve from when they were first identified. This could be due to the initiative. However, with no control group set up this is very difficult to conclude firmly. There is limited evidence that the initiative is having an effect on these pupils as an improvement can be seen in the examination results of each progressive cohort. Equally however, a number of other factors may well be responsible for this improvement. With the pressures placed on schools to improve, the senior management team may be using the predictive analytical tools more effectively to identify underachieving pupils who may respond better to the initiative. There may be better communication to the staff about who these pupils are and what their needs are, making staff better informed and more able to deal with these needs. This in turn may have improved teaching and learning opportunities for these pupils. Or even all or any combination of these issues. What can be said is that the initiative appears to be identifying underachieving pupils, who after going through the initiative see an improvement in their examination results. As far as the pupils are concerned they feel that there is a place for the initiative and that it has helped them achieve better examination grades as a result of going through the process. They saw the extra time given to them by a senior member of staff to focus, set targets and meet deadlines as a very valuable process and one that impacted positively on their examination results. They also felt that if they had not been given the opportunity they would not have been so successful. Considering these comments the initiative appears to be achieving what it set out to achieve but exactly how it is doing this needs further investigation with the use of a control group.

Evaluation of the initiative by the senior management does not appear to be a part of the management cycle for this initiative. No formal comparison of the analytical tools has been undertaken. The only analysis that is done is on the GCSE grades of the whole cohort by the Headteacher that are then presented to the staff. The initiative occurs every year based on a 'gut feeling' and anecdotal evidence that it is working well. There has not been a systematic evaluation to check if this is in fact true. As such no improvements have been incorporated into the initiative based on data from an evaluation. Hopefully the recommendations discussed in the next chapter will be seriously considered by the senior management team.

Is the initiative occurring too late? There is a lot of evidence to suggest that the initiative is occurring too late in the careers of the identified underachieving pupils. The school life questionnaire identified underachievement as early as Year 6 in male pupils. As pupils progress through the school there is a decrease in the number of teaching activities that they enjoy indicating demotivation especially in male pupils. Female pupils also become less motivated from Year 6 to 11 yet appear to be three times more motivated than the boys. The pupils in their interviews also suggested that the initiative should be started earlier suggesting as early as Year 9 but no later than Year 10. All this suggests that intervention strategies need to be implemented earlier than is happening at present perhaps as soon as they start at St James and especially in boys as Year 11 appears too late to be really effective in tackling underachievement.

The analytical tools appear to be useful in identifying underachieving pupils. Each tool has its own strengths and weaknesses. YELLIS under-predicts pupils' performance as does the Predictive Analytical tool whereas the Potential Analytical tool tends to over-predict examination performance. However, when used together underachieving pupils are identified and targeted with resulting success. What this study has brought to my attention are some of the ethical issues that impinge on this initiative. Many pupils can be identified as underachieving from pupils on very low grades right through the spectrum to those on the higher grades. It does not sit easily on my conscience that due to

an external pressure placed on the school to perform well that a political decision has had to be made by the senior management team to only target those pupils on the C/D grade borderline and more importantly only those capable of achieving at least five C grades. My perhaps idealistic view is that we should be targeting all underachieving pupils but I do understand the pressures faced by Headteachers and am aware that this idealistic view may not be effective in practice.

Finally the importance of the pupils' perceptions needs commenting on. The evidence shows that the pupils are very capable of making considered comments and recommendations about their education. They are very perceptive about their own abilities and are able to suggest changes that would improve not only their learning but also teaching practice as well. They were also able to suggest improvements to the initiative and see issues from an entirely different perspective to teachers. From their perceptions I have formulated recommendations that firstly address the initiative and this then follows naturally into how structures within the school can be modified or changed to take these recommendations into account. The challenge therefore is using pupil perceptions to make that difference.

Chapter 5. DISCUSSION

The previous chapter analysed the findings with respect to the research questions. The initiative appears to have some value in raising the examination performance of pupils, but requires a thorough evaluation to determine where its strengths and weaknesses are in order to improve its effectiveness. This evaluation, would also test the observation made in this study that the initiative is occurring too late and that this and other interventions are required earlier in the school pupils' careers. Pupils' perceptions about their education and how it could be improved proved to be very perceptive and generated recommendations worthy of consideration by senior management. This chapter then discusses the findings in relation to what other researchers have found and also discusses the recommendations generated by the pupils and how these could be incorporated using the structures and systems already operating in the school.

Pupils of both genders and all year groups appear to find teaching strategies that involve less teacher intervention a better learning experience. This is also confirmed by Wallace (1996:62) who found that pupils enjoy practical work as they can get on with them there being little teacher intervention once pupils are aware what it is they have to do. Practical work allows more independent learning, personal learning and work relating to the real world. It has been shown that the majority of activities perceived by pupils at St James' school as helping them to learn are those activities that require little teacher intervention, the activity being the responsibility of the pupil.

It is interesting to note however that the very activities the pupils have identified as being necessary for their improvement, asking for help and listening to the teacher, are the very activities that were identified in the questionnaire as those not helping them to learn. This needs further exploration, as there is an apparent tension between these perceptions of pupils on their learning.

Motivation to complete coursework was low amongst many male pupils, and homework and coursework were seen as an intrusion rather than an integral part of the educative process.

There were complaints that homework and especially coursework caused problems with revision for mocks. Some teachers appeared unaware of coursework deadlines in other subjects and still set homework together with coursework. Warrington and Younger (1996:9) found this and also found that pupils complained that homework timetables were not adhered to causing time management problems for pupils when it came to the completion and handing in of coursework in time for deadlines.

Recommendation 1

Teachers in the school under study therefore,

- need to investigate the appropriateness of more independent tasks for pupils within their subject areas.
- need to plan together more coherently as professionals rather than only as departments in order to see the whole picture with respect to all subjects, their homework nights and coursework deadlines.
- need to set homework tasks which are realistic with respect to time taken and due date taking into account other departmental homework policies.
- need to acknowledge competing demands from coursework, exam revision, other subjects and extra curriculum activities (Warrington and Younger 1996:92).

The management of coursework portfolios therefore requires management skills from pupils as well as staff, as does managing different assignments for different deadlines (Rudduck 1996:136). Pupils, especially male pupils found keeping up difficult and were prepared to hand in incomplete work, ask for extensions or not bother at all. There was always a tension between doing well in the coursework and time constraints of revising for the exam. As coursework provides a large percentage in most GCSE examinations, for example 25% in

science, this is an issue that needs urgent consideration by senior management. An overview of what is happening in each subject with respect to coursework, homework, revision and classwork needs to be undertaken so that all staff are aware of the competing demands put on pupils by the different departments. This could then be used to plan an effective timetable with deadlines for each subject identified and a more appropriate approach to setting homework and coursework worked out.

In the unstructured interview and some of the structured interviews, there was an indication that the disruptive behaviour displayed by male pupils was a way of “preparing the ground” for possible failure. Failure in GCSEs was a concern to the male pupils, as all indicated that they wanted to do well, and it was suggested that if they could show in some way that they were not bothered about doing well, it was not really their fault if they did fail. As Chaplain (1996:101-106) points out, the motivation to protect their self-worth results in pupils using a range of tactics to avoid damage to their self-esteem, this leads to under achievement. Protecting self-esteem and maintaining social identity and maintaining street credibility are very important in male pupils. It is not cool for disengaged boys to be seen to be paying serious attention to schoolwork, coursework or homework. Male pupils also tend to find themselves vulnerable in class to peer group pressure to muck about (Rudduck 1996:23). Boys therefore have to be coaxed to work so there is no loss of face. As one male pupil found, he was caught between disapproval and rejection from his peers and the possibility of failure in his GCSEs. He recognised that he had to live with this peer pressure at the time but then with his possible failure for the rest of his life, a tension he found very difficult to resolve to his satisfaction.

There is a marked difference between boy and girl motivation. Year 11 boys show the least motivation, but motivation in Year 6 appears to be lower than in Year 9. This could indicate that the problem of male underachievement and demotivation starts earlier than at first expected and requires further examination especially as the sample size of the project was so small.

In conclusion, out of school many young people find themselves involved in complex relationships and situations. They carry tough responsibilities, balancing multiple roles and often finding themselves dealing with conflicting loyalties. In contrast in schools the structure offers less responsibility and autonomy than many young people are accustomed to in their lives outside school (Rudduck *et al* 1996:173). They also have complex and important social lives that make little or no allowance for work out of school. It is almost as if they live two separate lives with two separate identities, and part of the issue of underachievement may be found in the unraveling of these phenomena.

Recommendation 2

The initiative in its current form is occurring too late and senior management need to pursue this issue by either starting the current initiative in Year 10 or implementing other intervention strategies earlier in the school. Evidence from the research suggests the involvement of the feeder schools would also be a worthwhile consideration in the early identification and targeting of underachieving pupils.

Questionnaire of school life

As expected male pupils appear to be less motivated than female pupils and interestingly perceive themselves as less motivated. Boys claim to be less pleased with their work than girls and feel that teachers also have the expectation that their work is not as good as the girls.

Rewards and sanctions need to be used carefully if they are to be effective. All pupils like the idea of rewards although male pupils prefer praise to be given in private, which supports Chaplain's (1996b) finding of male pupils protecting their self worth from their peers.

The apparent effectiveness of praise on motivation seems to lessen as pupils get older. Male pupils felt that the offer of material rewards would be motivators, but this was not the case with female pupils indicating a different teaching

approach with male pupils especially later on in their education may be worth investigating.

The effect of punishments depended on their type. Those that involved the knowledge of parents and took them away from their friends had a more motivating effect than being shouted at.

The biggest drop in motivation especially with boys is from Year 9 to Year 11. This seems to confirm Wallace (1996) where he suggests that the last two years of pupils' education is instrumental to get pupils through their GCSE examinations whereas at Key Stage 3, years 7,8 and 9, learning tends to be more for interest and satisfaction.

Structured interviews with underachievers pre GCSE examinations

Lack of motivation especially in the male pupils appears to play a major role in underachievement. This has been identified as being due to various factors. The perception that some teachers do not care and seem more interested in more motivated pupils was commented on. The pull of their peers and a culture where it is not cool to learn were perceived to affect their motivation. Being able to just do what they need to do and which subject lessons they can do it in also seem to be a factor in male pupil motivation. When asked how they could improve the pupils were able to identify specific strategies that they thought would help them to improve showing that they had an interest not only in their learning but also in its improvement.

Unstructured interview with underachieving pupil

The pupil knew what was required to get into college and that if he failed he had a friend willing to give him a job. This emphasised the dangerous way in which some male pupils operate. Why work hard to do the very best you can when you can identify what you need and do just enough to get by. Unfortunately for this pupil, and perhaps many more, he miscalculated what he

needed to achieve and fell short of getting onto the course he wanted to do at the college where he wanted to study.

Questionnaire for underachievers post GCSE results

Pupils were clear as to the aims of the initiative, why they had been chosen and were positive about the way that the initiative had helped them. They felt that if they had not been identified then they would not have achieved as well as they had and that the initiative had provided them with strategies to improve. It became clear to the pupils once targets had been set just how little time was left before the examinations and because of this they felt the initiative should be started earlier in their academic careers. Pupils felt that the initiative should be continued for future year groups and offered advice on how the initiative should improve.

Parental involvement was seen to be necessary in the initiative, more so at home, as this involvement was perceived by pupils as helping them to achieve.

Pupils identified a management issue of the initiative. The approach of mentors varied there seeming to be no coordination between mentors, with pupils receiving different qualities of mentoring. This indicates that the initiative is not being evaluated and so is not moving forward. It also shows the importance of feedback from pupils and how it could be used to inform management decisions. The pupils' perceptions also showed how important getting the right mentor is to the success of the initiative.

Recommendation 3

Pupils are able to offer highly perceptive comments not only on improvements in their immediate experience of education in their teaching and learning but also in the wider context of structures within the school and how they can be changed for the benefit of everyone. They are highly critical of themselves and as such their thoughts should be solicited and seriously considered by senior management when making policy decisions.

Analysis of predictive analytical tools used by SMT

The initiative appears to be worthwhile with respect to the Actual grades achieved by improving on the Predicted grades of underachieving pupils . The size of the group targeted appears to have some influence on the amount of success of the group. The larger group appears to be less successful than the smaller ones. Pupils found the initiative to be very worthwhile to them and offered positive recommendations for the improvement of the initiative.

The improvement in 5 A*-C grades in cohort 01 may have been due to a more structured approach by the mentors. Each predictive tool individually was not accurate when compared to the actual final grades produced. YELLIS tended to be more accurate at predicting how well a whole cohort would do and was not particularly accurate at predicting individual pupil performance. Potential grades tended to over predict how pupils would do. Predicted grades tended to under predict how pupils would perform. With all the cohorts there was an improvement on their Predicted grades.

Management implications

The pupils offered their opinions and views that backed up existing thoughts and also offered valuable insights confirming Rudduck *et al* (1996:1) argument that what pupils say about teaching, learning and schooling is not only worth listening to but provides an important foundation for thinking about ways of improving schools. They also report, that the conditions of learning do not adequately take account of the social maturity of young people, nor of the tensions and pressures they feel as they struggle to reconcile the demands of their social and personal lives with the development of their identity as learners (Ruddock *et al*, 1996).

The questionnaire provided evidence that there was underachievement in both boys and girls and that it appeared to manifest itself as early as Year 6 in male

pupils. The data collected therefore showed that underachievement was a reality but did not explain why it was happening. To this end the qualitative methods became more important in addressing the research questions.

As the strategy continues the evaluation of its success with respect to pupils' perceptions will become more important due to their initial support of the strategy. If underachievement in male pupils does start as early as Year 6, as the evidence from the school life questionnaire seemed to suggest, then it will be interesting to:

- Follow the progress of the target groups perceptions and achievement.
- Evaluate the success of the senior management strategy for Year 11 underachievers.
- Look for ways of cascading the strategy down the year groups.

If underachievement is occurring as early as Year 6 then identification and strategies to improve achievement in Year 11 could be too late for any real impact.

The school uses MIDYIS and YELLIS as a way of targeting pupils. There appears to be no co-ordination of these tests and the results are used in a very *ad hoc* way if at all by the departments. If this is the case then there appears to be a golden opportunity being missed with respect to the construction of an internal management information system that could have the potential for improving student achievement. Questions start to form:

- why is this happening?
- where in the management cycle is this occurring?
- what are departments doing with respect to using performance data to raise pupil achievement?
- are the pupils aware of this information?
- should the pupils be involved in using this information to raise their achievement? If so how?

- what are the pupils' perceptions of the use of their results in raising their examination performance?

Recommendation 4

A full audit needs to be undertaken to determine how the information from the analytical tools is being used by each department to improve teaching and learning.

Management issues

Using Bush's table (figure 2:1) summarising the elements of management for each model we can try and identify the models in use at St. James':

- The 'levels at which goals are determined', were institutional which match Formal, Collegial and Cultural.
- The 'process by which goals are determined', were set by the leaders, which matches Formal. It could be argued that all staff would agree with the goals of raising the achievement of underachieving pupils so Collegial could also be matched as well as Cultural.
- The 'relationship between goals and decisions', in this case decisions were based on the goals which matches Formal. With this set of management elements it is more difficult to link in the Collegial and Cultural models as this implies that the decisions were made by the staff as a whole, which they were not.
- The 'nature of the decision making process' was rational, which matches Formal. However, if by Collegial Bush means more than one person but less than five, then we can match the Collegial model as this would be the size of the team involved in the initiative.
- The 'nature of the structure', was hierarchial which matches Formal.
- 'Links with the environment', matches the Formal model and to a lesser extent Cultural.

- The ‘style of leadership’, matches Formal but again it could be argued that in the early stages of the process the Head seeks to promote consensus so Collegial is matched.

In a previous chapter Scheerens (1997:85), Marsh (1994) and Bush (1995:147) all discuss effective models that represent different ways of looking at educational institutions. It appears from their discussions that effective self improving schools require there to be elements of collegial and cultural models together with a strong professional development culture.

A summary of this information now appears in *Figure 5:1*

Figure 5:1 A table showing a summary of the models of educational management found in an initiative at St James’

Elements of management	Formal	Collegial	Political	Subjective	Ambiguity	Cultural
Level at which goals are determined	YES	YES				YES
Process by which goals are determined	YES	(yes?)				(yes?)
Relationship between goals and decisions	YES					
Nature of decision process	YES	(yes?)				
Nature of structure	YES					
Links with environment	YES					(yes?)
Style of leadership	YES	(yes?)				

The model of educational management that appears to fit the implementation of the initiative to raise underachievement at St. James is the Formal model with elements of Collegial and Cultural. It must be remembered that this is an impression of a single initiative and not the impression of the school management as a whole. What it does show is how difficult it is to interpret what is actually going on and that one model does not fit all. It could be argued that different models apply to different stages of the process and rather than saying that a particular model applies perhaps it would be more accurate to say that models interact and that one or more models are dominant at any one time.

As Bush points out it is rare for a single theory to capture the reality of management in any particular school. Rather, aspects of several perspectives are present in different proportions within each institution (Bush, 1995:148). To this end managers could improve their effectiveness by taking multiple vantage points rather than be locked into one perspective. This suggests that the approach to the management to the initiative should be more collegial and cultural rather than just the formal approach at present to include more staff and get more from the staff for the benefit of the pupils. This is a point I expand on later when I discuss structures present within the school that could be adapted and used to improve on the initiative.

Recommendation 5

The senior management team needs to look at strengthening the collegial and cultural aspects of the initiative. This would be useful in engaging the staff to take more responsibility for combating underachievement in their lessons by using some of the strategies indicated by the questionnaire findings.

The literature survey talks of the importance of evaluation in the management cycle. The three school improvement models summarised by Marsh (1994) all include the steps of evaluation, reviewing progress and problems and especially reflecting on the findings or effects as a basis for further planning, subsequent action and so on, through a succession of cycles. Godsmark's study (1994) also discusses the importance of analysing all relevant facts in order to make the best possible decisions. The findings from the study appear to suggest that none of the particular management strategies discussed in the literature review are being followed by the senior management team and that the evaluation stage for whatever reason was not addressed. For example the size of the target group affected how successful the initiative was at raising the examination grades of the identified underachieving pupils. These sorts of findings can only be acted upon after an evaluation has taken place something that the senior management team needs to build into their management approach for this and other initiatives. This is a particularly important finding for the senior management team not just for this strategy but also for all strategies that are

implemented in the school, and has implications for the management philosophy of the senior management team. Once the senior management team has evaluated the performance of this strategy, it can then make informed decisions about the worth of other strategies. For example, developing its own value added performance indicators and their use to assess and improve student, department and teacher performance (Levacic, 1994), and the satisfaction indicators discussed by Harris *et al* (1996:9).

An interesting development that has come out of the findings is that initiatives are initiated and then the staff are left to get on with them. Evaluation is only happening if a new initiative is to be introduced or if it is felt that things are not progressing as well as they might. Evaluation therefore, does not appear to be an integral part of the management cycle. There also appears to be little or no sharing of good practice between departments with staff working in isolated pockets apparently unaware of what is happening around them. This could be due to competition between departments to achieve the best results possible for their department. It may be that staff in their respective departments, are so concerned to improve their own results that they either feel they have no time to be aware of what is happening elsewhere in the school or that what is happening is irrelevant to what they are doing. I feel that this is very shortsighted. There is a lot of expertise within the school that has developed different strategies to cope with many issues. These strategies need to be shared with all staff. Education should be seen as improving the learning environment for all pupils in all areas of the curriculum so that these pupils can achieve to the best of their potential. The school has to get away from these isolated working pockets to a system where there is a forum to enable the sharing of good practice, INSET for staff given by staff, after all we are all dealing with the same set of pupils.

Recommendation 6

If the senior management wanted the initiative to be effective then a full evaluation of the initiative should have taken place early on in its implementation. It should have had a control group and ideally would have followed a cohort through the five years they were at St James'. As we are now five years into the initiative a full audit now would not be practical but an evaluation that becomes a part of the cycle would benefit the initiatives. This may lead onto consideration of the whole management style and process and the part that evaluation plays in all areas of management and all subsequent initiatives. Senior managers should now ensure that all initiatives are evaluated and this evaluation should happen on a regular basis.

Sergiovanni (2001:101) describes schools as complex adaptive systems. They are self managing in the sense that the system consists of webs or networks of agents or components that act independently of each other without guidance from any form of central control. Yet they are able to engage in cooperative behaviour that is they don't work as a collection of individuals ('I's') but the coming together of a 'We'. To further improve on the 'very good school' label awarded by OFSTED this description of working more as a 'We' that is a collegial approach needs to be followed more rigorously.

Evaluation of implications of the study for influencing and improving current practices

Discussion-reflections

The focus was not only on the actual project that is target setting and mentoring as part of raising achievement but on how the school managed itself and its initiatives and whether/how it learned from these experiences. It appears that the *ad-hoc* nature of the mentoring may have been due to the lack of time put aside and the lack of direction from someone placed in charge of the strategy. There does appear to be a structure already in place that could be used more successfully in this strategy. This structure does not appear to have been identified due to the lack of evaluation of this particular strategy indicating that the management is not learning from the experiences it is gaining. The structure that I have identified is the pastoral system presently running within the school. This appears to be the only structure that crosses all of the curriculum areas. Heads of Year should be allowed to take a more pro active role in the identification and targeting of their Year Group as soon as the cohort arrives, perhaps even at feeder schools though this may be problematic due to the new pupils being found at different schools. There is also at present, a data management system available in the school that could be adapted to carry all of the pupil information, for example pupils yearly reports and assessment data, that should be available on the school network for Heads of Year to manage.

After having recent training on this system I can see the huge potential for its use, a use at present which is not being exploited. The system provides a history of results on individual pupils as they progress through the years. This system allows the assessment data to be held centrally rather than assessment data being kept on stand alone departmental computers which is what happens at present. As this system is linked into the administration system analysis of results can be done on many different parameters for example an analysis can be done based on free school meals or even post code. This would then provide a means for the identification of underachieving pupils at any stage in their

careers for Heads of Year to identify, track, monitor and act upon. This would reduce the number of staff involved, as records of performance are at present inputted into department stand-alone computers for the storage of information in the eventual generation of reports. With one person responsible for each year group a more consistent approach in the identification of underachievers is possible due to on-going regular tracking rather than leaving the identification until it may be too late in Year 11. Time is also saved as pupils are better known by the Heads of Year and their tutors. This needs to be built into the everyday school routine and should not be a bolt on activity. The role of the Head of Year within the school should therefore be changed to include pupil tracking through pupil performance, identification of underachieving pupils, their targeting and intervention strategies. Also, earlier intervention may reduce the number of pupils requiring mentoring in Year 11.

As with all recommendations there is a price. First there is the selling of the idea to the senior management team. At the moment control of the initiative is with them and the mentoring is carried out by the select few. Convincing them that it could be done just as well by others will be an issue. Then the other Heads of Year will need to agree to a change in job description and will require training in the use of the relevant software and in data handling something they may not desire or be comfortable with.

Hardware will have to be routed to Heads of Department and Heads of Year offices and connected to the network. All of this requires time and money. Policies will have to be drawn up on what information needs to be entered into the database and whose responsibility it will become, for example a named member of each department or a specified secretary. Following on from this then, I would suggest that senior management need to either do an audit of all resources that could be used for underachievement and if they are not being used, asking why not and how then could it be better used. Or giving a person or persons the responsibility for the audit and ensuring the use of these identified resources.

Time also needs to be put aside to find out how underachieving pupils are identified and what initiatives are implemented in local schools, if they are working and how they can be improved. Why re-invent the wheel when so much good work is already being done? Perhaps even the creation of a role description within the school that includes overall responsibility for raising pupil achievement, should be considered by the senior management team for the benefit of all pupils. All of this may require a lot of initial extra expense and work but at the end of the day a system will have been set up with the long term benefits far outweighing the problems and cost.

However, what this evaluation has shown is that although for each cohort the results are analysed for the underachievers by the senior management team, there is little cross analysis between the cohorts. It appears that the initiative is done each year with little or no reference to what has happened in previous years, the desired result being to see an improvement in the underachievers identified. There is no further evaluation to identify weaknesses or strengths with the initiative or on how to improve the initiative. This is a shame, as this appears to be an initiative that makes a real difference for underachieving pupils at the D/C boundary but no evaluation as to how it works or how it can be improved and perhaps used elsewhere has taken place.

Underachievement is not quite as easy to identify, address and solve as I at first thought. It appears to be a very complex and convoluting phenomena influenced by many different factors which also impinge on each other creating a confusing tangled web, which may become very difficult to untangle completely. In my school with the very small sample that I studied there were at least three different groups of underachieving pupils. How many underachieving pupils are there in the school and how many other different groups are there? What we are dealing with are individual human beings that bring their own individual set of experiences and issues into school. Each one of these pupils will have their own expectations and as such it is difficult to use a blanket approach to deal with underachievement. As each pupil is unique and may therefore have a unique set of characteristics that need to be dealt with to

help with their particular underachievement issues a mentoring approach where the individual is targeted on a personal basis may be more successful than an overarching 'catch all' strategy.

Another way forward in tackling underachievement could be at the departmental level rather than in a discrete whole school strategy that involves a few members of the senior management team. The question of underachievement being addressed at department level, where each department has its own policy on underachievement that is derived from its syllabus, staffing and philosophy, may be a more effective approach as the staff are working with pupils at a personal level over a long period of time and should be able to identify trends in a pupil's achievement within one of their groups. The departmental staff should therefore be constantly evaluating their approaches to teaching and learning and the impact on pupil achievement and so will be able to see what is successful for a particular student and are less likely to proceed with ineffective strategies constantly changing as pupil circumstances change. Again, the structure is present within the school and a lot of work may needlessly be being reproduced by the different departments. Someone to co-ordinate and chair some sort of forum where these issues can be addressed and discussed may provide some answers to these issues.

There also needs to be a forum for the sharing and discussion of these departmental policies. This would be useful to find out what is going on in each department, if any work is being replicated between departments, what appears to be working and what is not working and why, how do departments identify underachieving pupils and do individual departments identify the same pupils as underachievers?

The Heads of Department meetings needs to be more of a meeting of professional minds where these issues can be discussed and good practice can be shared for the benefit of all pupils, rather than a one way information delivering process. A survey on Gifted and Talented provision within each department was not as successful as I had expected. Some of the questionnaires

were rushed and one of the core subjects did not hand the questionnaire back in until after the presentation at the Head of Department meeting. This all could have been due to an ineffective questionnaire leading to misunderstanding, lack of time to complete the questionnaire properly or the perception of lack of importance of the issues being addressed. What ever the reasons for these less than desirable responses it does indicate the importance to get Heads of Department discussing these issues in some sort of forum and sharing their own good practice with each other.

A problem that may be raised with discussion at Heads of Department meetings is that of time. As with any new initiative time has to be used to get things started, but once going the potential benefits for the pupils as well as the departments would be worth this initial cost of time. Discussions do not have to take place at every Heads of Department meeting in fact once started a working party could be formed that may not even comprise of Department Heads but of other staff representing the position of their department. This working party could meet when appropriate and report back to Heads of Department meetings on a regular basis.

Working parties are all very well but in my experience it is only those members of staff who have an interest in a particular issue that get involved, and they may not represent the whole of the staff. Also, I feel that if we are to be successful in tackling the issues of underachievement then it has to involve all the staff and all of the pupils. It has to become a part of the whole school ethos and approached from departmental level up and not senior management level down. These are therefore more reasons to approach this at departmental level where a policy can be discussed and constructed by the professionals who then have to implement it. They are more liable to see the pitfalls and benefits as they are much closer to the pupils with respect to their taught subjects.

From the findings of this research it can be shown that pupils do have important things to say about their schooling and what should happen to them in terms of their education. They are able to voice relevant concerns and ideas that need to

be considered seriously when any policy is to be made. At present their voice can only be heard when staff feel they need to evaluate a particular initiative. The staff and senior management needs to consider this fact and look to somehow providing an opportunity for the pupil voice to be heard. How this can be achieved is an interesting question, which needs full discussion with the staff and pupils to canvass ideas for an appropriate strategy for the school. The setting up of a Staff Pupil Council could provide a forum for the airing of pupils' views. Once again there is already a framework in place at St James', called STAG (Student Teachers Action Group), where elected pupils are able to represent the views of their classmates on issues like litter and the introduction of milk in the canteen and also, what chocolate should be provided in the chocolate machines. Here is an excellent opportunity to 'helicopter' the discussions up a level. Why not let pupils discuss some of the issues addressed in this research? Obviously this needs to be handled carefully, but what an opportunity to let pupils voice their perceptions and ideas on some real educational issues like teaching and learning, bullying, underachievement, assessment and monitoring, implementation and evaluation of initiatives that directly affect them and their learning.

Another change of direction is that cost-effective methods of the routine evaluation of any innovation need to be found by the senior management team. A way around this is to evaluate implementation as it is occurring and not leaving the evaluation to the end of the initiative where it may be seen as unimportant, where perhaps another initiative has arrived and is now higher in peoples priorities. If evaluation and implementation are linked then the evaluation will be able to help shape and guide the initiative perhaps making the process more efficient and overall less time consuming rather than leaving the evaluation until the end of the initiative when it may be too late to impact directly. If the initiative can be evaluated as it proceeds problems and successes can be addressed, as they occur to help ensure the initiative is a success. Also, issues can be followed through by staff involved who are familiar with what is happening at the time of the initiative rather than at the end when commitment may be rather less than when the initiative was being implemented. Memories

about events and why certain decisions were made may also be less reliable if an evaluation is undertaken after an initiative has been completed (figure 3:2). This approach to evaluation if adopted would be a new concept at St James', one which may help to address the issue of cost in terms of time.

In order to address some of these issues perhaps the school needs to evaluate the direction it is taking at present. Should we be driven by examination results to achieve increasing value added between the Key Stages, or should the senior management be considering a new environment within the school where a discourse can occur creating a community of shared practice, what can loosely be labeled a learning organisation (Sergiovanni, 2001)? This would be an organisation where evaluation is seen as an integral part of the implementation process and the sharing of good practice is at the forefront of everyday school life. This would be an organisation where the views are elicited from all interested parties so that new initiatives and teaching and learning styles really do become a part of the whole school ethos. This would be an organisation where issues that affect departments are not just addressed by senior management, but a two way process of information giving and decision making occurs with departments taking more of a lead in dealing with issues like addressing underachievement, and that good practice is then shared between all members of all departments.

In summary

The initiative appears to be raising the grades of identified underachieving pupils. In that sense it is achieving what it has set out to achieve. How it is actually doing this is still not clear to me. The analytical tools whilst inaccurate at predicting final results on their own do appear successful in identifying pupils who are underachieving and are able to improve their examination performance. What is not clear is the effect the initiative would have on all underachieving pupils as the group of pupils targeted is very specific. I feel that the success of the strategy could further be increased by an on going evaluation to refine the process of identification, targeting and pupil mentoring and trying to assess the actual effect of the initiative on underachievement. This evaluation does not appear to be happening and ways of incorporating this into the process of the initiative need to be found for effective management practice to occur. Appointing someone to oversee, evaluate and direct the strategy may be an approach to help address the issue of the lack of evaluation, as may identifying present structures that exist in the school that could be used to support the initiative in the identification, targeting and mentoring of underachieving pupils. As an aside it would be interesting to do an audit to find out if evaluation is neglected in other areas of management strategy. If the initiative is found to be an effective tool in identifying and tackling underachievement there may be benefits for this strategy in researching efforts in other local schools looking to address this issue.

Pupils' perceptions proved to be very informative identifying issues like the different approaches of mentors that now need to be evaluated to determine if a more consistent approach is required. Their views and also data gathered from the research tools indicate that the implementation of further strategies lower down the school need considering by senior management team to address the issue of earlier than at first thought pupil underachievement. To support these earlier initiatives more comprehensive links with feeder schools by appropriate Heads of Year could help identify and target underachieving pupils before they

enter St. James'. Pupils' views of the strategy and their recommendations therefore need to be considered seriously by senior management team and used to inform any decisions generated.

Whilst the research was taking place I was in middle management, now I find myself in senior management and so I am in the fortunate position of seeing the initiative through both sets of eyes. As a middle manager I was able to see the importance of the initiative almost to the exclusion of other initiatives occurring in the school, I had a local perspective being concerned with the local issues of the initiative. Now as a senior manager I have a global picture of what is happening in the school and can see how this initiative impacts on others and is impacted upon. I can understand the decision to target a narrow band of underachieving pupils due to increasing pupils' grades that will best affect the school whilst ensuring the efficient use of mentors' time. But I don't actually agree with it. Sometimes you have to stand back and have a really good look at what is going on in your place of work. This research has been the vehicle to allow that to happen. It has made me think about structures and processes within education but most of all it has made me think about the pupils and how what is present within the school can be made better for those pupils.

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Appendix

Appendix 1 Definitions of key terms.

St. James' is the name given to the school where the study took place.

Pupils predicted grades are the grades based upon the Yellis examination taken by pupils at the start of Year 10.

Pupils potential grades are the grades that staff felt pupils were capable of achieving based upon the mock examination results, their coursework marks, and the pupils' attitude to work.

SMT is used as an abbreviation for senior management team, which includes the Headteacher and two Deputy Headteachers.

HOD is used as an abbreviation for Heads of Department.

HOY is used as an abbreviation for Heads of Year.

Demotivation in pupils in the school life questionnaire was constructed as tasks which appeared to stop pupils from wanting to learn. Motivation as tasks that encouraged pupils to learn.

Targeting of pupils in this study means identification of strategies by mentors and mentees to improve pupil performance.

Logbooks are diaries carried by every pupil to record their homework and also for teachers to maintain contact with the parents. The logbook has to be signed by parents every week to indicate they have seen all comments and is then signed by tutors. The logbook system has proved to be a very effective communication system between staff and parents and as such was used in the research process to ensure good response rates and to keep parents informed.

Mentors is the term used for senior managers involved in the support of the targeted underachieving pupils.

Mentees is the term used for the targeted underachieving pupils receiving support from the mentors.

Appendix 2

QUESTIONNAIRE : SCHOOL LIFE

We are interested in your opinions on school life. This survey is confidential, please be as honest as you can.

Boy☐

Girl☐

Year Group☐

Tick (✓) the box which best describes your answer.

	All of the time	Most of the time	Some of the time	Never
I enjoy school				
I enjoy lessons				
I work hard in lessons				
I am pleased with the work I produce				
My teacher is pleased with the work I produce				
At home I ask my parents/or other adult for help with my work				
In lessons I ask my teacher for help with my work				
In lessons I ask my friends for help with my work				
I get told off by my teacher in lessons				
I am praised by my teacher in lessons				

	Enjoy it a lot	Enjoy it	Don't mind it	Dislike it
If I am praised by the teacher in front of the class I				
When I am praised by the teacher in private I				
If I am punished by the teacher in front of the class I				
If I am punished by the teacher in private I				
If I receive a positive logbook comment I				
If my results are read out in class I				

	Yes	No	Don't know
I would work harder if I got a reward			

Put the following rewards in order of preference - 1 being best, 10 being least

1) Positive logbook comment	
2) Non-uniform day	
3) Praise from teacher	
4) Prize	
5) Certificate	
6) Praise from Headteacher	
7) Comment in exercise book	
8) Phone call/letter to parents	
9) Extra house points	
10) Leave school early	
11) Trip	
12) Other - Explain below	

	Yes	No	Don't know
Do you take more notice when told off by a male teacher?			
The threat of punishment makes me work harder			

Tick (✓) the punishments that have been given to you.

a) Lines	
b) Essay	
c) Litter picking	
d) Break detention	
e) Lunch detention	
f) After-school detention	
g) Phone call home	
h) Letter home	
i) Being shouted at	
j) Sent out of lesson	
k) Moved from friends	
l) Bad logbook comment	
m) Isolation	
n) Suspension	
o) Sent to the Head	
p) Special report	
q) Other. Please explain	

Which five punishments from the above list (a - q) would make you work hardest?

1)	2)	3)	4)	5)
----	----	----	----	----

Which activities do you enjoy in lessons. Tick (✓) the box that best describes your feelings about each.

	Enjoy a lot	Enjoy	Don't mind	Dislike
1) Group discussion				
2) Reading				
3) Creative writing				
4) Factual writing				
5) Role play				
6) Answering teachers questions				
7) Group work				
8) Project work				
9) Practical work				
10) Drawing/display work				
11) Computer work				
12) Copying				
13) Dictation				
14) Listening to teacher				
15) Working with a partner				
16) Working on my own				
17) Answer questions after watching video				
18) Solving problems				

Which five from the above list (1 - 18) help you learn most?

a)	b)	c)	d)	e)
----	----	----	----	----

¹Top favourite 5 in order/Least favourite 5 in order

SUBJECT	TOP FAVOURITE	LEAST FAVOURITE
English Language		
Religious Education		
Mathematics		
Physical Education		
English Literature		
Geography		
History		
Biology		
Chemistry		
Physics		
Science		
Drama		
Art		
Music		
Textiles		
Food		
Graphics		
Resistant Materials		
Electronics		
ICT (Computers)		
French		

Spanish		
Child Development		

Appendix 3 Structured Interview Schedule

Name.

How hard do you feel that you are working?

What grades do you think that you will get in your GCSEs?

Could you do better?

a) No (why? What help do you need?)

b) Yes (how? What help do you need?)

Do you think this new system of help will work for you? (How? Why? Is it a good idea?)

Appendix 4 Lesson Observation Schedule Headings

Time in minutes	Task	Pupil on Task	Pupil off Task	Pupil Action	Teacher Action
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					

Appendix 5 **Year 11 Post Underachievement Initiative Perceptions**

You will remember that in Year 11 you were identified as needing a little extra help from a senior member of staff up until your GCSEs.

In order to assess how effective this initiative was I would be very grateful if you could complete the questionnaire. It will also help me towards my PhD!!

If you are unable to complete it tonight and hand it back to me I have included a stamped addressed envelope for you to use.

It really is very important that you answer as honestly as possible and you return the questionnaire to me as soon as possible as I have deadlines for essays to be handed in!!!

Many thanks for your help

Digby Carrington-Howell

Please answer the questions as fully as possible:

Name _____

Project

What was the project for _____

Why were you identified? _____

In what way did the project help you? _____

Could you have done better without the project? YES NO

Explain why _____

Please indicate the most useful part of the project for you?

- meeting with your mentor
- meeting with mentor and parents
- target setting
- other (please explain)

Is the project useful for future year groups? YES NO

Explain why _____

Should the project be done earlier in your school career? YES NO

If so when? _____

In what ways could the project be improved? _____

Parents

Was it a good idea to get your parents involved YES NO

Did it help you anymore to get your parents involved YES NO

How did your parents help you? _____

Mentors

How often did you meet with your mentor? _____

What did you discuss with your mentor? _____

Were you told what to do or did you have an input? _____

How do you think that the extra time with staff helped you? _____

Would you have preferred to choose your mentor? YES NO

Explain why _____

You

What is an underachiever? _____

Why do you think that you were underachieving? _____

How many grade Cs and above did you get? _____

Did you achieve your potential? YES NO

How could you have done better? _____

Destination

Could describe whether you are in employment or education. Please give as many details as possible _____

Appendix 6 Data manipulation from the analytical tools.

School examination results and the schools analytical tools were found on different spreadsheets. This meant that both spreadsheets had information that needed to be merged. The issue at that point was that the headings for each spreadsheet were different which caused problems for the merging of data. This meant very careful manipulation of the two sets of data so that when completed the columns all corresponded. This raised the issue of why the schools system was not in line with the examination boards'. Also, the examination data was for all of the Year 11 pupils. This meant that the data had to be stripped to leave the underachieving pupils' data on the spreadsheet, another activity that required care and concentration. So work on the results data had to involve the following work:

- the headings for both spreadsheets had to be checked and matched to ensure that the columns on both spreadsheets had the correct corresponding data.
- all irrelevant data needed to be "stripped" away leaving only the data for the identified underachieving pupils.
- only when the above had been completed could both sets of edited data then be merged onto one single spreadsheet.
- the columns then had to be sorted by surname, then by field so that the information was in the correct order for analysis.

This then created a single spreadsheet with all the identified underachieving pupils' results together. This was predicted to take about two hours of work for each year group under study, in reality it took a lot longer. The sorting of data did speed up as the technique was learnt and errors in the process removed. Once the data had been sorted then the analysis could begin. Plotting predicted grades against actual grades should produce a scattergraph. However, to do this all the grades needed to be given numerical values so that they could be

recognised by the computer and plotted onto a graph. The values given to the grades were as follows:

A=7, B=6, C=5, D=4, E=3, F=2, G=1, U=0.

To do this a further spreadsheet had to be made and the numerical information obtained using the "search and change" facility in the spreadsheet tools option.

The first problem was that the grades generated by the analytical tools were stored on a different spreadsheet to the actual grades achieved, which were supplied by the exam board. The second problem was the merging of the two spreadsheets. As the subjects were set out differently on each spreadsheet great care was needed to ensure that the correct data was compared within the different columns. This made comparison and manipulation of grades very difficult and took far longer than expected. Once these problems were sorted the underachieving pupils then had to be identified and placed onto separate spreadsheets. These spreadsheets then had to be formatted so that they all had the same layout and then were printed off. Once this was completed the analysis was done by hand, a less than satisfactory technique but essential as I was able to work on it whenever I had a spare moment, whereas, if the information was left on the computer, at that time I did not have access to a laptop computer, it restricted my access and so limited the time when I could analyse the data.

Appendix 7 Table showing male pupil attitudes to rewards and punishments

	M11	M9	M6
If I am praised by the teacher in front of the class I	0	1	3
When I am praised by the teacher in private I	2	4	3
If I am punished by the teacher in front of the class I	5	5	5
If I am punished by the teacher in private I	5	5	5
If I receive a positive logbook comment I	2	5	NA
I would work harder if I got a reward	5	5	2

Appendix 8 Table showing female pupils' attitudes to rewards and punishments

	F11	F9	F6
If I am praised by the teacher in front of the class I	1	1	4
When I am praised by the teacher in private I	3	3	4
If I am punished by the teacher in front of the class I	5	5	5
If I am punished by the teacher in private I	5	5	5
If I receive a positive logbook comment I	3	4	NA
I would work harder if I got a reward	2	3	1

Appendix 9 Table showing male pupils' choice of rewards

	M11	M9	M6
rewards in order of preference	Prize 4.8	Trip 1.2	Prize 2.6
	Money 3	Leave school early 4.4	Trip 3.8
		Prize 4.8	Non-uniform day 4.8

Appendix 10 Table showing female pupils' choice of rewards

	F11	F9	F6
rewards in order of preference	Trip 3	Leave school early 2.8	Trip 3.2
	Leave school early 3.6	Prize 3.2	Praise from Head 3.6
	Prize 3.6	Non-uniform day 3.2	Prize 4.3

Appendix 11 Table showing the effect of punishment on male pupils

	M11	M9	M6
I take more notice when told off by a male teacher	2	4	3
The threat of punishment makes me work harder	3	3	5

Appendix 12 Table showing the effect of punishment on female pupils

	F11	F9	F6
I take more notice when told off by a male teacher	0	1	3
The threat of punishment makes me work harder	2	4	5

Appendix 13 Table showing the order of motivational punishments for male pupils

	M11	M9	M6
punishments that make	Suspension 4	Suspension 5	Suspension 4
me work hardest	Isolation 3	Isolation 5	Shouted at 4
	Special report 3	Phone home 4	
	Moved from friends 2	After-school detention 4	
	(mum in)		

Appendix 14 Table showing the order of motivational punishments for female pupils

	F11	F9	F6
punishments that make	Suspension 4	Suspension 5	Shouted at 3
me work hardest?	Isolation 4	Isolation 4	Letter home 2
	Special report 4	Special report 4	Lunch detention 2
	Litter picking 3	Sent to Head 4	Sent to Head 2
		After-school detention 3	
		Phone home 3	

Appendix 15 Table showing activities perceived by male pupils that help them learn

	M11	M9	M6
activities help me learn most?	Practical work 4	Project work 4	Project work 4
	Project work 4	Group discussion 3	Reading 3
	Group discussion 4		Creative writing 3
	Group work 3		Solving problems 3

Appendix 16 Table showing activities perceived by female pupils that help them learn

	F11	F9	F6
activities help me learn most?	Role play 4	Project work 4	Computer work 4
	Solving problems 4	Group discussion 3	Factual writing 4
	Group discussion 3	Working with a partner 3	Group discussion 3
		Listening to teacher 3	

Appendix 17 Table showing activities perceived by male pupils that do not help them learn

	M11	M9	M6
activities that do not help me learn	Dictation 5	Dictation 5	Dictation 5
	Answering teacher 5	Copying 5	Copying 4
	Factual writing 5	Answering teacher 5	
	Listening to teacher 5		
	Working on your own 5		
	Creative writing 4		
	Copying 4		

Appendix 18 Table showing activities perceived by female pupils that do not help them learn

	F11	F9	F6
activities that do not help me learn	Copying 5	Answering teacher 5	Dictation 5
	Dictation 5	Listening to teacher 5	
	Reading 4	Copying 4	
	Listening 4		
	Working on your own 4		

Appendix 19 Table showing male pupils’ perceptions of subjects

	M11	M9	M6
favourite subjects	Physical Education 5	ICT (Computers) 4	Art 5
	Electronics 4	Physical Education 3	English Language 4
	Biology 3	Art 3	Physical Education 3
			ICT (Computers) 3
			Drama 3
least favourite subjects	Physics 5	French 5	French 5
	Mathematics 4	Geography 3	Geography 5
	French 3	Textiles 3	Mathematics 4
	English Language 3		Religious Education 3
			History 3
			Science 3

Appendix 20 Table showing female pupils’ perceptions of subjects

	F11	F9	F6
favourite subjects	Physical Education 3	Physical Education 3	Religious Education 4
		Art 3	Drama 4
		Music 3	Art 4
		Food 3	Physical Education 3
			English Language 3
			ICT (Computers) 3
least favourite subjects	Mathematics 4	French 3	Geography 4
	Physics 4		French 3
	Religious Education 4		
	French 3		

Appendix 21 Table showing the teaching activities enjoyed in lessons

Year group	11	9	6
numbers of activities boys enjoyed	25	50	60
numbers of activities girls enjoyed	43	51	61

Appendix 22 Table showing a Comparison of Predictive tool with Actual A*-C grades achieved between cohorts of identified underachievers

cohort	% Predicted A*-C	% Actual A*-C	% difference
98	32.3	49.2	+16.9
00	26.0	30.3	+4.3
01	31.2	45.2	+14.0

Appendix 23 Table showing a comparison of Predictive tool with Actual 5 A*-C grades achieved between cohorts of identified underachievers

cohort	% Predicted 5 A*-C	% Actual 5 A*-C	% difference
98	35	57	+22
00	17	23	+6
01	17	50	+33

Appendix 24 Table showing a comparison of Predicted and Actual individual grades between cohorts for individual identified underachieving pupils

cohort	% overachieved	% achieved	% underachieved
98	78	14	8
00	33	40	27
01	58	17	25